BUILDING COMMUNITY, MAKING IT VISIBLE:
KINDERGARTEN CONSTRUCTIONS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

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*****
The Ohio State University
2003

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ABSTRACT

This microethnography, situated within an interpretive framework of qualitative, educational research, focuses on a group of kindergartners in a large, urban city school system in the Midwest as they co-construct a learning community with their teacher/researcher. Using photographs, field notes transcription, and multiple perspectives from teacher and children, a cycle of interpretation emerges that helps both parties reflect on their community, as it happens. Drawing on social constructivist theory, constructivist grounded theory methodology, and strategies from participant/observer methodology, the model that emerges is dynamic and child-friendly. I begin by establishing routines that support the child’s voice in the decision making process. I then develop a recursive
narrative that generates theory of the actions of those who live it. I analyze the findings and discuss the complications of working with children while researching them. I end by suggesting that this process, or cycle of interpretation, can inform teacher practice, professional development, and parent understandings about the nature of the child and what it means to co-construct a caring community.
Dedicated to my husband, Bob
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many people that have pushed me to look closely, think deeply, and reflect frequently on my own practice of building a learning community. Bob, my husband of 33 years, a history teacher and optimist, supported my tentative ideas with clear critique and penetrating questions. He and I have made a life of caring for other people’s children. Teammates Susan, Jim, and Elaine were especially helpful as they yielded time to reflect with me.

My advisor, David Fernie kept my eyes on the prize with specific examples of how to pull the data together. His belief in me the researcher kept the doubts at bay. By helping me give form to the many ideas that were circulating, we winnowed to the best. Committee
members, Rebecca Kantor-Martin and Marilyn Johnston guided me through revision work that made all the difference in the final analysis.

I also thank my son Charles and his wife, Melinda, who helped me through the technical jungle of Microsoft Word and Excel and made my thoughts fit graphs and matrices.

Finally, I say thanks to the learning community where I have worked for 29 years. It moved me to do more, explain more, agitate, activate, and rally parents and children around the idea that a quality education comes to those who inquire about what is and wonder what can be.
VITA

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Aligned study:
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   Literacy collaborative
   Reggio Emilia study group
   Assessment and evaluation
   Child advocacy issues
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to describe and display the importance of building community with kindergartners. Thirty years of teaching young children has convinced me that understanding how relationships are formed during the course of a school year can offer insights into community-building that are usually not visible in the day-to-day flow of classroom life. While I began my career in teaching thinking that the social and emotional aspects of community-building were secondary to academic outcomes, I have come to believe that relationships are foundational. Relationships maintain and strengthen academic outcomes.
Throughout this study, I move in and out of the teacher/researcher mode, looking for ways to show the impact friendships (or relationships) have on a particular group of young children. The more I learned about the teacher/researcher role (Erickson, 1986; Bolster, 1983; Florio & Walsh, 1983) the more aware I became of the point of view I brought to my study. Teachers, like other interpretive researchers, are concerned with the specifics of local meaning and local action. (Erickson, 1986). My classroom is rife with local meanings and actions that beg for consistent and on-going interpretation based in the daily life of kindergartners and their teacher. One task of this interpretive research is to clarify rapidly changing perceptions about what community means for teacher and child. I want to interpret, from a teacher/researcher’s perspective, the events and relationships that combine to produce a new community of learners.
This approach focuses on situated meanings which incorporate the various reaction and perspectives of students. In common with the teacher’s perspective, it assumes the multiple causation of events: unanticipated contingencies illuminate the local meanings. (Bolster, 1983, pp.305-306)

I reason that longtime exposure to teaching young children, and constructivist education theory, predisposed me toward collecting the kind of data that could show how child and teacher co-construct an inclusive community of learners. The inclusive designation, and the local meaning I give it, is particularly important in this study because I seek to integrate diverse patterns of thought (the children’s) with concepts about child development and social constructivist theory that I hold. My role as teacher/researcher is especially enhanced when I realize that as a participant/observer I have the opportunity to “try out” emerging theories as the community is constructed. I also have the time to “hold out” for clearer, more collaborative work to emerge as the study progresses.
My fear is that many educators will dismiss this research based on the title alone. The idea that kindergartners could create a learning community comes under the “who cares” list of things that must be done in the busy lives of teachers. Teachers have the responsibility to make sure the curriculum is aligned with the district, the state, and the federal government. Prescriptive environments, we are told, can assure proficiency outcomes. “Scientific research” is touted as the cure all for reading deficiencies and teachers fall under the spell of politicians who offer incentive packages if scores go up. (Linn, 2000, Grismer et. al., 2000, and Bracey, 2000.) Current, conventional wisdom says that teachers who keep good order have created a desirable environment for young children. Why worry about any other kind of environment?
Community: Perspectives That Converge And Diverge

What does community building have to do with the real world of schooling? What do teachers and students in learning communities do that is different from the contemporary model of teach and test? Those kinds of questions, and the partial answers I obtain in my study, point to a complex web of possibilities that are emerging in qualitative work about the young child. Kohn (2000), Malaguzzi (1992) and Goleman (2000) offer vital examples of what happens in classrooms that are centered on building community as well as the motives and intentions that explain it.

It is fascinating to note at this point that “community” is at least two things -- common “belonging equally to, shared by the group and, unity “the oneness of spirit, aims, interests, feelings which is made up of diverse elements or individuals” (Webster’s New World Dictionary, 1980). Many more connotations come alive when “learning
community” is applied to a particular context. Specific kinds of actions, and their interpretations, are available for deeper scrutiny. The appellation “learning community” fits the kind of work I have attempted to capture and discover through transcripts, photographs, video, child projects, and teacher journals which chronicle a year in the life of kindergartners experiencing the ups and downs of community building. The actions of the child, the child’s influence on the curriculum and the community, are basic elements in this micro ethnographic focus. The teacher’s role in this co-constructive effort is also examined through personal journals, discussions with peers, and transcriptions of the ongoing work with children in the process of developing a learning community from the ground up from the first day in their first public school classroom. Curricular decisions, specific elements introduced in the course of the year, and circle talks about the meaning of community that were developing among the children,
were teacher-initiated at first. As the year progresses, children and teacher co-construct the activities that help the community function.

Social constructivists like Elizabeth Graue (1999) shape the way I view what is happening while my class goes about creating a learning community. She explains the art and science of doing qualitative research with children. She demonstrates the research connection between what is seen and what is known. I too, am concerned about seeing and hearing the child, an ethical consideration that surfaces as the study goes forward. Qualitative researchers and theories on socialization (Erickson, 1986; Vygotsky, 1987; Corsaro, 1985) to name a few, helped me conceptualize a model that incorporated the examination of everyday discourse as a consistent way of getting at children’s and teacher’s intentions. Examples of everyday discourse are included in several formats in my study: photographs with
teacher/child interpretations, transcripts of circle talks, kid reporter
interviews, and teacher focus group sessions.

My field notes about confrontations and discussions opened up
the possibility that motivation is one way of understanding child action.
The dramatic transcripts of young children working on becoming part
of a group (Fernie & Kantor, 1996) taught me to look deeper into the
action I did see and count on the child as a co-translator of its
meaning.

My own inquiry into the powerful image of the child that Reggio
Emilia (2000) preschools export, strengthens my stance that
community building is not only worth doing but must be done.

For years, the education establishment and the state have been
counting up numbers without attending to the child’s perspective,
intention, or the influence of motivation on those numbers. A closer
look at what it takes to adapt, negotiate, and collaborate with children
demonstrates it is not easy. It is a task that few teachers approach.

For those that do, the quality of the program can expand exponentially.

In this study, I attempt to put quality in the forefront and capitalize on the cumulative efforts of teacher and child as they try to make sense of the experience called community-building. My study seeks to support the rights of both parties to create their own, unique learning environment based on the relationships that develop over time.

As the children and teacher commit to building a learning community and develop ways of acting that move individual agendas ahead, norms for the group develop. As the substance of my study emerges from the data, I speculate on how to offer hope to teachers, children, parents, and others interested in finding a place to begin the business of building a learning community.
The phenomenon of community-building is far from static. The fluid and tentative nature of the personal accounts from children and teacher about the activities designed to foster community changed over time. In time, they reinforced my assumption that intention, and especially the intention to form relationships (Malaguzzi, 1993) is at the center of a learning community. I know this well as a teacher. My own classroom practice, connected to constructivist theory, and embedded in interpretive methods, assures me that change will occur. Everyday classroom processes which the children and I develop, in order to see the action of community building, are developmental and emergent in nature. Just as I, the teacher, selected specific ways to create a context for discussing ideas and conflicts, the children chose ways to work within the community that we were building. My research attempts to describe and interpret the actions of teacher and child in a specific way. “There is a need for specific understanding through
documentation of concrete details of practice” (Erickson, 1986, p.121).

Other ethnographies focusing mainly on classroom activities, also ask how the classroom culture is socially constructed, (Green & Bloome, 1997; Bloome & Green, 1984) and they too, are representative of studies that seek to understand classrooms, and the perspectives of its participants, *in their own terms*. Green’s work (1983) is especially applicable in this case:

> Central to this conceptualization is the view of classroom as communicative environments in which the events that make up everyday life are constructed as part of the interactions between teachers and students . . . classroom events are dynamic activities constructed by teacher and student as they process, build on, and work with both their own and other’s messages and behaviors . . . (pp. 335, 336)

Using field notes, and transcriptions of classroom talk, the ability that committed individuals have to shape and be shaped by the company they keep, becomes visible. “Everyday life is invisible. We do not
realize the patterns in our actions as we perform them.” (Erickson, 1986). I want to make those patterns of talk and action “familiar and strange” (Erickson, 1984) in the hopes of reigniting interest in the child and teacher’s perception of teaching and learning.

At this point in the study, my initial teacher perspectives, theoretical understandings, and specific methodological strategies were guiding my search toward discovering what our community was. The framework for examining not only how kindergartners construct community but why they want to do it, widens the borders a bit more. I now consider other influences that were shaping the way I approached this study as it went forward.

_Influences on Study: An Interpretive Stance_

Research articles and conversations with colleagues on site began to connect in my mind with Lisa Goldstein’s idea that _Teaching_
with Love (1997) is possible. She recommends incorporating “nurturing” into community-building themes. I reasoned that it would take time, but I could integrate that aspect into our community by tuning into the signals the children were sending out. Some were fearful, some were angry, and some were just waiting to begin “real” school. The diverse feelings surrounding the opening day of school could be interpreted, with the children, and form a starting point for my dissertation. Erickson (1986) suggested that a narrative, interpretive orientation could “be used by researchers in which the immediate (often intuitive) meanings of actions to the actors involved are of central interest” (p. 120). I planned to use dialogue (conversations among children and with children) to create a narrative text that could later be analyzed. I was willing and by now, able to begin collecting the data that could support this contention. My heart was engaged with the ring of the first bell. Thomas Sergiovanni (1994) has
gone so far as to declare that “community building *must* become the heart of any school improvement effort.” Building community is the center or heart of this study.

This kind of research, then, calls out for intimate knowledge; the kind of knowledge that describes children’s interactions. It includes listening to their explanations of intention and motivation. It encompasses revisiting those interactions in the light of new information and examining changing actions that may signal changes in intent (Graue, 1993.)

I knew I would need to develop new tools to make sense of the interactions that move so quickly across the landscape of a classroom. Part of this dissertation, then, is the search for methods that are situated in the realization that understanding “local meanings” (Erickson, 1986) is an important part of micro ethnography. Local meanings can shift over time, and within a given context, from person
to person. Interpretive fieldwork that considers “the local meanings happenings have for the people involved in them” (p. 121) is especially pertinent to my study. From my point of view as a teacher/researcher, “issues of content rather than issues of procedure” (Erickson, 1986, p.120) are of primary importance. Seeing and hearing the work of the teacher and child allows interested others to “be” in the environment. Focusing on a child’s intention and motivation, revealed in transcripts, circle talks, and projects, may create the desire in the reader to know more about this aspect of teaching and learning. The reader may come to understand teaching and learning differently as well. Narrative vignettes, or as Erickson terms them, “analytic narratives” (1986, p. 149) help this happen. The narrative analysis I use have two purposes:

1. The descriptions convey specific actions taken by specific people.
2. The descriptions contain elements of teacher/researcher perspective that enrich the reading and interpretive connections between one classroom event and another. Working with the idea that knowledge of what is typical in a specific context is within the reach of all, the documentation supporting the quest to understand how a community of learners is co-constructed, brings coherence to my interpretive mission.

While I was considering a wide range of definitions about community in the academic sense, the children and I were creating our own meanings of it day by day, throughout the school year. The interpretive and reflexive stance I assume, leads me to definitions of the phenomena called community-building.

Definitions of Community

John Dewey, writing a revision in 1943 of *The School and Society*, supplied a definition of community that envisions a school culture
fostering democracy: “The question of the relation of the school to the child’s life is at bottom simply this: shall we ignore the real child in favor of the dead image we have erected, or shall we give it play and satisfaction?” (p. 60). Paraphrasing Dewey; if we believe that the growth of the child’s imagination, “in flexibility, in scope, and in sympathy” with nature and society is worth anything, then “nature and society can live in the schoolroom” . . . “the substance of that experience, that culture, shall be democratic. (p. 61). In my study, teacher and children discover and explore the ways and means of interacting, of making decisions, and of evaluating actions that are key descriptors of democracy in action.

In coming to understand the complexities of a particular culture, multiple perspectives must be considered. Long term, in-depth interaction between the teacher and the children, the kind of minute inspection of a culture that micro ethnography demands, assists my
interpretation. Looking through an ethnographer’s lens, I am open to adjusting it to the ebb and flow of classroom life. The children and I use dialogue, photographs, interpretations of the photographs, journal writing (teacher and child), children’s literature, and circle talks to making meaning out of the process of interpretation that evolves through the course of the year. In turn, the process of recording (through tape and transcription) reveals some of the intentions that accompany the actions, feelings, and child/teacher initiated activities that are subjected to analysis and deeper reflection as the study progresses. The artifacts, and the ways of talking about them, influence curriculum and teacher decision making. Circle talks, and curricular changes made in concert with the children, fed the will to do more, together.

Nel Noddings described a community in *Educating Moral People* (2002), which recognized the “light and the dark side” of it. Quoting
John Gardner as representative of the dichotomy:

The community teaches. If it is healthy it will impart a coherent value system. If it is chaotic or degenerate, lessons will be taught anyway, but not lessons that heal and strengthen. (Gardner, 1991, p. 17)

The community I sought to build with the children is based on nurturing the emotional intelligence of its members. I wanted a community that taught inclusive lessons that could heal. Part of my reasoning for this position included: the wide range of cultural norms present among the socio-economic groups represented in my classroom, the shifting maturation levels typical in kindergartners, and the varying degrees of social competence that I saw emerging over the course of the school year. Emotional intelligence, tied closely as it is with social competence, can be taught. (Stone & Dillehurst, 1978; Schaps & Battistich, 1992; Greenberg, 1992; Hawkins, 1992, and Lantieri, 1990). Learning how to build a healthy community was possible for
teacher and children. The process of co-creating a vital community could be made visible.

Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers (1996), describe a learning community as an “open system.” Their work binds Dewey’s democratic purpose and Nodding’s message of morality together. It illuminates the kind of community that this study hopes to reveal.

In an open system, information vital to the life of the classroom and school flows back and forth between members. “Open systems encourage participation and ongoing learning in order to create new knowledge and new insights.” (p. 101). Open systems, according to Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, “are networks of fluid relationships” that can change and transform its identity. (p. 83). Because the system of interpretation that develops in my study was designed as it happened, the explorations the children and I had were leading us toward different ways of thinking about friendship. Friends, how to make them and how
to lose them, became part of our culture. Specific questions emerged from this framework of interpretive research and the teacher/researcher’s role within it. I began to realize that interpretive fieldwork is analogous to my life. I could take the ordinary skills of observation and reflection and make it “more systematic and deliberate.” (Erickson, 1986, p. 157). I could devise ways of documenting those observations and reflections which fit my classroom context and “deliberate” about them from an “insider’s” point of view. I could learn to ask my own questions.

Questions About Community

C. Zahn-Waxler and colleagues (1992), while working at the National Institute of Mental Health, found that young children have:

The cognitive capacity to interpret the physical and psychological states of others, the emotional capacity to affectively experience the other’s state, and the behavioral repertoire that permits the possibility of trying to alleviated discomfort in others. These are the capabilities that underlie children’s caring behavior in the presence of another person’s distress. There are signs that children feel responsible for others at a very young age. (pp. 29-35)
The caring behavior that Zahn-Waxler described found new life within the transcripts, photographs, and field notes of my study. From the first few days of school, the sounds and actions of children invested in knowing more about each other are heard and seen. As the study went forward, the artifacts and actions which surrounded me served to guide me toward formulating questions that I hoped would reveal the inner workings of this particular community.

The questions reminded me why I had started the process of reviewing and identifying how our community came to be. They refreshed my mind and refocused it on the main task. The research questions I seek to answer within my kindergarten context are as follows:

- How do kindergartners build a learning community?
- What effect does teacher selection of activities, formats, and routines have on community building?
- What effect does child initiation of activities have on community building?
- How does community building change over time?
- What assumptions do I have as a teacher/researcher as I approach this study?
- As the year progresses, and the community forms, what changes do I see happening in my relationship with my students?
I organized this review of literature around several concepts that were influencing my role as teacher/researcher and the co-constructed nature of the work I was developing with the children in my classroom. Hoping to provide a conceptual framework for the micro ethnography I was attempting, I began with what I knew best, multiple intelligence theory. I relate it to a more recently elaborated theoretical position, social constructivism. I also consider how specific studies support my emerging knowledge base about qualitative research in general and this micro ethnography in particular.
Building Community

How community is made is open to various interpretations.

Searching for relevant literature to support my beginning assumptions about the kind of community that could be co-constructed, I found insight and relevance from diverse sources.


Children (and teachers) are active meaning makers, testing out theories and trying to make sense of themselves and the world around them. Learning comes from discovering surprising things ... grappling with a peer’s perspective, reformulating one’s own approach ... (p. 66).

Kohn goes on to explain that the “grappling with perspective” can be the most important thing a group of people can do. Thinking of learning as coming from discovering surprising things (like other people!) and wrestling with another’s perspective, prepared me to
rethink my approach to teaching and led me to deeper reflection about the kind of community my students and I could create.

The central idea of a community as a place in which students feel cared about and encouraged to care for each other is a “we” proposition. The teacher and the child come to think in the plural: “They feel connected to each other; they are a part of “us” (Kohn, 1996, p.101). The cooperative community model that Kohn describes, offers an invitation to move “beyond discipline” (p. 107), and into the co constructive properties of teaching and learning.

Kohn’s emphasis on the “we” in the teaching/learning process is further supported in Daniel Goleman’s book, Emotional Intelligence (1997). Goleman describes traits that could help create the kind of learning community I was hoping to forge with my kindergartners. His list of emotionally intelligent abilities contains competencies needed for co constructing a community in terms of characteristics of individuals:
“self-motivation, persistence in the face of frustration, control impulse, delay of gratification, regulating one’s moods, empathy, and hope.” (p.34).

*Multiple Intelligences: Seeing Intention and Motivation*

Other theories (and the practices that emerged from them) were operating within the walls of the school, and within me as part of the conceptual framework that guides my teaching practice. They needed consideration as well. Howard Gardner’s work, *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice* (1993), for example, was a hypothesis about learning that the entire staff studied, and to widely varying degrees, put into practice. Gardner’s intelligence theory left marks on my perspective of teaching and learning in philosophical and practical ways. Multiple intelligence theory clarified some of my assumptions about education in general and fit with the interpretations of community that originated with social constructivists like Kohn and
Goleman. Other theorists, Vygotsky (1962/1986), Corsaro (1985), Schwandt (1994), and Walsh & Graue (1998), would soon lead me toward a clearer conception of how relationships affect and effect the work of building community.

Elements of the relationships that I study for this research are embedded in the “interpersonal intelligence” described by Gardner in his seminal work, *Frames of Mind*, in 1993. (For a fuller description of the multiple intelligences see Appendix A). Later, Armstrong (2000), interpreted Interpersonal strength as:

The ability to perceive and make distinctions in the moods, intentions, motivations, and feelings of other people. It can include sensitivity to facial expressions, voice, and gestures; the capacity for discrimination among many different kinds of interpersonal cues; and the ability to respond effectively to those cues in some pragmatic way. (p.2)

Armstrong’s educational application of interpersonal intelligence is especially apt in my study that makes relationships visible while a community is co-constructed. These indicators, which I have been
incorporating into my practice for fifteen years, add weight to my argument that intention and motivation can be seen and interpreted.

Armstrong (2000, p. 27) described children who are motivated to:

- socialize with peers
- give advice to friends who have problems
- belong to informal or formal groups
- play games with other children
- have two or more close friends
- have a good sense of concern for others
- be sought out by others for his/her company

These interpersonal cues are incorporated in a daily schedule that guides curricular decisions, planning sessions, and center design in my classroom. The schedule is a pragmatic look at the flow of MI theory within the routines of the day. Careful examination of the daily schedule links MI theory to my practice. The schedule which I created, shows a set of centers that allow the multiple intelligences to flourish within the classroom. (see schedule and flow of the day in Appendix B).
Various components of MI theory fed community building activities throughout this study. Other key points of Gardner’s (1993) model that support my study include:

- People possess all seven intelligences. MI theory is not the kind that identifies “a type”. It is a theory of cognitive functioning, and it proposes that all people have degrees of the seven intelligences. I focus on the interpersonal intelligence.

- Most people can develop each intelligence to an adequate level of competency. Educational models that support this contention include: Edwards, 1979; Carini, 1982 and Gardner, 1987. Coupled with Goleman’s elaboration of interpersonal or emotional intelligence, it is clear that social competency can be taught.

- Intelligences usually work together in complex ways. Intelligences are always interacting with each other. The interactional nature of the intelligences bodes well for teachers and children interested in co-constructing a community.
• There are many ways to be intelligent within each category. MI theory emphasizes the rich diversity of ways in which people show their gifts within intelligences. There is no set standard. This component is especially salient as the children and teacher sustain their conversations about community through the year 2000-2001. Changes are expected. Shared meanings are encouraged as norms are co-constructed.

*Emotional Intelligence: Foundation of Relationships*

Gardner also points out that other intelligences could exist and Daniel Goleman (1997) steps into the discussion when he asserts his theory that emotional intelligence is the prime mover in a functioning society. (p. 43-44). Goleman’s list of descriptors that focus on relationships, outlines and strengthens my contention that understanding how a community can be co-constructed has far reaching ramifications. I paraphrase:

1. Motivating oneself. Delaying gratification, masking emotions in the service of a goal underlies self-control and supports productive actions with others.
2. Recognizing emotions in others. Empathy is fundamental. People who are empathetic are more attuned to the subtle social signals that indicate what others need or want.

3. Handling emotions in others. The art of relationship is also a skill in managing emotions in others. People who have this skill are popular leaders with a well developed sense of interpersonal effectiveness. (Goleman, 1997, p. 283-284)

Emotional skills, Goleman argues, are the foundation of relationships that work. Varying degrees of emotional intelligence and MI theory are enacted, and made visible, in the documentation to come. They form a land bridge for the researcher to recreate the co-construction process of this particular classroom. Using Goleman’s emotional intelligence theory and Gardner’s MI theory, I can cross back and forth between the roles of teacher/researcher and fully join in the birth of a growing community. This theoretical stance emphasizes another reason why an inclusive community is important. No matter where a child may situate himself or herself interpersonally, having the
emotional intelligence to use those skills makes inclusion the norm in
the community.

Social Constructivism: Making Meaning for Teacher and Child

Social constructivism, and recent elaborations of it, is key to
understanding how my representation of the child’s work and the
teacher interpretation of it, focuses more on social process and
interaction than on the cognitive assertions. Fosnot, (1996) sees
“taken-as-shared” meanings developing the culture of a community
that in turns questions those meanings in unique ways, reflecting on
what has gone before, and generating new possibilities for the future
(p.28). She applies constructivism to education and cautions
educators that “no cookbook teaching style” exists. Sifting through
her list, and adding my own emphasis in parentheses, helps me see
where construction and co-construction separate. Fosnot seems to be
missing the importance of relationship between teacher and child. I
add (in parentheses below) the partnership element inherent in social constructivist classrooms that seek to engage young children in meaning making activities.

General principles of learning derived from constructivism:

• Learning is development. It requires invention and self-organization on the part of the learner. (Teachers and children initiate questions and work together to answer them.)

• Errors need to be perceived as a result of learners’ conceptions. (Co construction can offer young children the opportunity to pursue open-ended projects where contradictions are clarified within the community of learners.)

• Reflective abstraction is the driving force of learning. (Social constructivism uses the language of dialogue, collaboration, and negotiation to facilitate this process.)

• Dialogue within a community engenders further thinking. The learners rather than the teacher are responsible for defending, proving, and communicating their ideas to the classroom community. (Teachers and children are responsible for communicating ideas to the community. Critique of work is a joint process.)
• Learning proceeds toward the development of structures. (Teachers and children are capable of developing strategies that support the “big ideas” (Schifter & Fosnot, 1993) that can come from teacher or child. Interdependencies are seen as right and proper. Relationships strengthen learning.) (Fosnot, 1996, p.29-30)

In Richard Peterson’s text, *Life in a crowded place: Making a learning community* (1992), interdependencies, relationships, and emotional intelligence, are again emphasized. They are requirements for moving learning and teaching beyond conformity and compliance toward co-construction. Peterson sees the teacher’s role in a learning community as directing liberation and empowerment. He argues for “students assuming responsibility for their own learning.” (p. 121). My research considers the learning that takes place as kindergartners discover the ways they can affect the physical and social environments operating in our classroom. Peterson tell us how children and teachers can affect the environment through rituals,
celebrations, negotiated roles, and dialogue. If teachers want the children to take on responsibility, Peterson comments, “they must first give them responsibility.” (p.123) Giving responsibility to young children teaches them the work of co-constructing their environment is vital. Making a community work takes the energy and persistence of all.

While I agree with Kohn, Goldman, and Peterson that empathy and perseverance can be taught through the experiences of building a learning community, other researchers were calling my attention to how it could be done. Bohm (1989) states that unless a community shares a coherent meaning, a community cannot be formed. Since the sense of meaning (the value and significance we give an event or situation) influences our perceptions of what is around us, how we make decisions, and the actions we take, shared meanings are key in constructing community. Creating shared meanings with
kindergartners is consuming and invigorating. Much like any living organism, a classroom can grow or perish depending on the systems that support it. Katz (1989) saw communities as groups of people who can do together what they could not accomplish alone and “who have a stake in each others’ well being” (p.41).

Wheatley & Kellner Rogers (1996) look at forming the culture of community as group action “revolving around the perceived needs of the group” (p. 98). Further, they urge people interested in making community-building visible to: “Use its freedom to explore its identity. Feel free to look outward, to bring in others, to contemplate new information.” These explorations, they assert, lead the system (community) into “new and different ways of being” (p. 101).

When children and teachers are exposed to thinking about how a community can be formed, they tackle real-life issue that require uncovering interdependencies within their own classrooms.
Doll (1993, p. 15) suggests that the primary challenge in open community systems is not to bring process to closure, but to “direct the transformations in such a manner that the process is renewed. Every closure... is a new beginning, and every new beginning is connected historically with its past... every end is a turning point in the ongoing process of organizing... meaning making.” These comments reinforce my sense of this study as an emergent, developmental process. It will require a flexible, problem-finding and problem-solving method to detail and describe it. Before that can be tackled, however, other borders need fixing.

William Corsaro, in Friendship and Peer Culture in the Early Years (1985), used an “interpretive approach” (p. 279) to extend the early constructivist view that children not only act on their environment, but also participate in the social world that is constructed. His main finding, that children “help to shape (and share in) their own
developmental experiences through their interactions with peers” are keys to the co-construction and shared meanings that I see as indicators of community building. By focusing on language and discourse, Corsaro was able to use play situations in a preschool to uncover the conflicts and collaborations that made it tick. His frustration with trying to identify connections between spontaneous play and subsequent learning pushed me toward finding an additional way of doing just that through documentation, child/teacher interpretation, and technological tools.

The developmental process that is deeply rooted in the links between the Individual and social history, then changes in children’s life worlds, influences or brings about cognitive change and development. Child development, then cannot be fully documented unless it is studied as it occurs in the life worlds of children. Corsaro (1985, p. 296)

The “life world” I inhabit with children and other adults also carries a social history. Vygotsky, (1962/1986); Bruner & Ratner, (1978); and Ninio & Bruner, (1978) suggest that moving away from just telling the
story towards co-constructing it with the assistance of others

enriches the interpretation process and supports voices that are

usually not heard. I am composing the text by collaborating and

reflecting with the child, a social construction process that

emphasizes teacher and child voice.

Other social constructivists like Schwandt (1994) approach

constructivism by “following our participants, rendering one

interpretation among multiple interpretation of a shared or individual

reality.” A researcher’s attention to detail in the constructivist realm

sensitizes them to multiple realities and multiple viewpoints (Charmaz,

2000). My study seeks to emphasize the child’s definition of action

and how the child and teacher recognize, produce, and reproduce

actions that support community building. In short, a social

constructivist lens requires seeking meaning for teacher and child.
Keeping the focus on the interaction between the two primary actors came from reflection about what I knew as “constructivist education” (DeVries, 1996). DeVries said that “allowing children to raise their own questions” was necessary for a community of collaboration to prosper. Social constructivists like Loris Malaguzzi (1996) recognized that the “naturalness of children’s creative and practical processes” must be preserved and reviewed if the teacher’s objective of “rigorous hypothesis” is to occur. Creating new theories of understanding is a two-way street that aims to combine teacher perception and action with child perception and action.

McDermott & Roth, (1978) described this two-way street as a way to “look across situations.” Social constructivism, in their view, had to be done in an environment that people build for each other. That environment in turn helps the researcher understand the interactions that develop over time. McDermott and Roth believed that
the environment had to be “extremely well-defined”. It is my belief that an environment that teaches ways in which a community is formed supplies the necessary situation for observing how it is fashioned. While I agree that the primary focus of social constructivist learning is on interaction or relationship, an equally compelling argument can be made for how an environment that is mutually constructed becomes a teacher. More than just a setting, the environment I chose to help construct, is filled with intention and purpose that become clear as the data are examined.

Because the environment is also affected by what the community says it is, I investigated research that focused on dialogue. Isaacs (1994) and Smith (1994), saw dialogue as suspending assumptions but it is clear they do not mean laying assumptions aside. Rather, dialogue means exploring assumptions from new angles. In their separate studies, Isaacs and Smith emphasized that dialogue is a
central avenue where collaboration and inquiry move in tandem as the
community building process goes forward. Dialogue is a way of
communicating that allows members of a school community to learn
with and from each other. “It is about listening, for multiple
perspectives before solutions are proposed” Isaacs (1994).

Dialogue is facilitated in the open, fluid, and adaptive space where
we learn (see chapter 3, Figure 3.1) and is not without conflict. In this
study, the child’s view of the use of the space conflicts with the
teacher’s. Discussing the conflict, and determining factors which
influence decisions that are made, connects changes in the physical
environment to changes in the teacher and child’s understanding of
how the space can be used. Because social constructivism demands
dialogue, conflicting goals and differing agendas should be examined
and explained by both actors in the process of community building.
Mehan (1980) looked at the dialogic side of context in this way:
Contexts are not to be equated with the physical surrounding of settings like classrooms, kitchen, and churches; they are constructed by the people present in varying combination of participant and audience. As McDermott and Roth (1978) have put it, contexts are constituted by what people are doing, as well as when and where they are doing it. That is, people in interaction serve as environments for each other. And, ultimately, social contexts consist of mutually ratified and constructed environments. (p. 136)

**Reggio Emilia: Documenting Relationships**

Reggio Emilia is a program that deeply reflects the marriage between cognitive and social constructivism as it highlights the provocative relationships that exist among teachers and children. It is a cross-cultural example of an environment that uses shared meaning-making and co-constructed contexts in the municipal preschools located in the city of Reggio Emilia, Italy. The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education, as it has come to be called in the United States, has its roots in postwar Italy, 1945. Loris Malaguzzi, a teacher, was instrumental in gathering mothers together who were
interested in creating a school from the wreckage surrounding them at
the end of World War II. They set about building a learning community
that eventually won the support of the city government. With one of
it’s preschools (Scuola Diana) recently recognized as “one of the
world’s best” in TIME (1992), Reggio Emilia preschools provide a model
for American educators who are seeking closer relationships with
children and their families.

I saw my first Reggio exhibit in 1991. Part art and part
interpretive text, large panels of photographs with explanations about
the processes depicted were presented with highly detailed
representations of children’s work under the banner of “The Hundred
Languages of Children”. Wire, clay, paint, 3D models and natural
objects were used to demonstrate the Reggio approach to teaching and
learning. The sophistication of the artistic representations, rendered
by 2 - 5 year old children, was startling. As I read the text
accompanying the projects, I knew that “art” didn’t begin to scratch the surface of what and how Reggio was.

This kind of documentation supplied detailed observations about teaching and learning theories held by teachers and children. The narratives that explained a child’s use of multimedia to express thoughts and feelings opened up a new way for me to consider how multiple languages, or symbol systems, were reflected in Reggio work.

The purposes of documentation are many. LeeKeenan and Edwards (1992) restate the basic tenets of documentation as:

- providing children a way to reflect and interpret their experiences
- evoking memories
- creating a sense of history
- communicating ideas to others

It is interesting to note that the descriptions listed by LeeKeenan & Edwards (1992) furthered this study about community-building.
Looking for ways to reflect and interpret with my kindergartners, in particular, pushed my personal study of the approach toward participating in a five year study group. “Reggio To Action” (R2A) was designed to explore the possibilities for integrating Reggio concepts into the practice of teachers at several central Ohio schools. Under the auspices of a major university, the study group met monthly. I started incorporating Reggio elements into my practice in 1997, beginning with documentation.

Initially, I saw the Reggio method of documentation as a way to speak about and for the children I knew best, my kindergartners. Carla Rinaldi in *Making Learning Visible* (2001), describes documentation as a strategy that “could help to confirm our declarations and deepen our understandings.” (p. 29). It’s a tool that can show the steps a child takes in a particular project, engage a parent in the educational life of the child, and work as a ready method of reflection for the teacher.
Later, the deep philosophical model Reggio provided about what young children are able to do appealed to the social constructivist background I was bringing to my research. As I learned more about the intentions the Italians had for documentation, my perception of its use for this study expanded. I could now see how the “recursive interpretation” that Fred Erickson (1981) wrote about could truly maximize the opportunity to “...change focus, modify, generate new data, identify other issues, shape writing, and include local ideas.”

Looking for ways to identify and interpret the complex relationship between teacher and child, and struggling with how to show the changing views of each over time, led me to the details, the deep descriptions, the minute conversations that characterize the data I have collected. If I want to describe how a community is made and not born, I reasoned, I must find a way to capture that fluid growth. Intuitively, I knew the information was “out there” but only as I looked
at the information with Reggio eyes did I see the possibilities emerge and converge. Documentation could help me, my students, and interested others, visualize the community we were building.

While qualitative researchers like David Fernie (personal communication, August 9, 2002) were pushing me to find key incidents, Reggio was showing me how they might look. Researching with photographs as place and time keepers, helped me see the evolving method that is apparent in Reggio documentation. That is, writing about the child, for the child, and with the child, can create the elaborate world of the child that few see. Revisiting key incidents within circle talks, personal journals, and child initiated projects further added to my knowledge about what they saw as being important parts of building a learning community.

Documentation, the data in this study, did help me “learn to speak in ways so that others can hear what we have learned.”
Erickson (1981, p. 248). The socially constructed nature of documentation and the way it evolved in my own research, was embedded in larger theories of activity and change. Vygotsky and Graue surfaced later and reinforced the idea that context as well as content is co-constructed.

Because child and teacher share the responsibility of creating new knowledge it “should be complicated” (Malaguzzi, 1988, p.11). Documentation articulates, simplifies, and creates a text that can be examined. To reveal the complexities and interrelationships of community building through documentation provides an example of the complicated knowledge construction process of children and teacher. When that process is detailed and described, it can communicate the power inherent in a relationship that fosters critical thinking and inquiry. In describing relationships, Malaguzzi (1993) sees them as “a coming together of elements interacting dynamically toward a common
purpose.” (p. 10) Further, he sees the strength of relationships in expanding the forms and functions of interactions.

Reggio teachers seek to support social exchanges that better ensure the flow of expectations, activities, cooperation, conflicts, and choices, as we favor discussion of problems that integrate the cognitive, affective, and expressive domains. (p. 10)

Just as Malaguzzi suggests that supporting social exchanges has far-reaching ramifications, he cautions teachers to be observant of “extraordinary incidents” that can affirm relationship as a fundamental, organizing strategy of their system. I reaffirm the necessity of telling the story of exceptional experiences from at least two points of view, the teacher’s and the child’s. Unfortunately, the system in which I operate has testing goals as fundamental, organizing structures. Fortunately, the connections between multiple intelligence theory and Reggio Emilia’s program is encouraging. A recent collaboration (2001) between Howard Gardner’s Project Zero and
Reggio’s project-based documentation, clearly shows the relevance of co-construction while seeking to make learning visible. Documentation helps to shape the learning that takes place and links it to the community at hand. The interpersonal strengths that teachers and children bring to the task of documentation can be seen as co-construction. Documentation, then, combines sense-making interpretive text with panel displays of graphic representations of the co-construction process. That places Reggio Emilia, and its practices, squarely in the interpretive tradition. Documentation makes relationships visible.

Co-Constructing Relationships

The powerful relationship that exists between teacher and child not only fosters critical thinking and inquiry; it also affects the way the narrative, or story gets told. Co-construction of story is more likely to occur in a community that considers more that one point of
Dixon, Frank & Green (1999) writing about how classroom cultures are constructed, looked at co-construction this way: “In order to construct the events and participate in the events that make a community, the members of it need to make observations about what is occurring.” (p. 4) Teacher and children in this study define what is appropriate to do by interpreting the actions they see. They are “shaping and being shaped” (p. 4) by events that happen on a daily basis. They are making their observations and reflections visible to other members of the community. Overtime, examining what is seen by both parties, can lead to the reconstruction of a community as well.

Polkinghorne (1995) likewise suggests that the researcher consider the interrelationships that the main characters display as the story unfolds. “In developing the story’s setting, the researcher needs to be mindful not only of the general cultural environment” but the importance of “significant other people” and how they “affect the
actions and goals of the protagonists.” (p. 17) The protagonists, teacher and children in this case, tell their story jointly. The activities that they choose, and the ways they choose to display them, affects the way the community operates. Green (1983) makes the co-constructed designation even clearer “. . . classroom events . . . are dynamic activities constructed by teachers and students as they process, build on, and work with both their own and others’ messages and behaviors . . .” (p.335-357).

Carlina Rinaldi, writing in The Hundred Languages of Children (1996), sees co-construction in a slightly different way. Speaking of the symbiotic relationship between teacher and child, she offers a definition of co-construction that allows teachers to “re invent and re educate ourselves along with the children. Not only does our knowledge organize theirs, but also the children’s ways of being and dealing with reality likewise influences what we know, feel, and do.” (p. 111)
Malaguzzi’s lyrical statement (1996) underscores the connection between teaching and learning and emphasizes the co-constructed nature of community building. “Learning and teaching should not stand on opposite banks and just watch the river flow by; instead, they should embark together on a journey down the water. Through active, reciprocal exchange, teaching can strengthen learning how to learn.” (p. 79).

Then too, Graue & Walsh (1998) consider the importance of social interaction when working with children. “We are interested in what goes on between children, how children function in groups, and how they transact and interact.” (p. xvii). The social nature of their research supports the co-constructing efforts of child and teacher to make sense of the world they are creating. My research focuses on what children do, and what teachers do with children, as they move toward establishing a community. The methods that I employ are
closely tied to the child and situated within a practice designed by the
teacher. “Research, like life itself, is a connected endeavor” (p.31).

Connections that are made between children and adults can be
examined through other theory bases as well.

Activity Theory: Reconstructing Relationships

Just as Kohn (1996), Goleman (1997), Malaguzzi (1988), and
Graue & Walsh (1998) were situating contextual studies under the
umbrella of social constructivism and valuing the power of dialogue to
produce a cohesive community, other social constructivist theorists
like Vygotsky (1962) and Mehan (1980) were discussing mutually
constructed environments. Vygotsky (1962) looked for the intentions
and motivations within those environments that were revealed in the
activities of children and teachers. Wertsch, (1985), interpreting
Vygotsky, explained this “activity setting” as a “... socially defined
setting . . . grounded in a set of assumptions about appropriate roles, goals, and means used by the participants in that setting . . .” (p. 212).

If contexts are “constituted by what people are doing as well as when and where they are doing it”, (McDermott & Roth, 1978), then the microethnography I conduct centers on human intentions, co-constructed in an environment designed to foster community building. Vygotsky (1962/1987) reasoned that action within a defined context served as the origin of intention and action. I eventually saw how the goals and means to obtain them portrayed the ways in which my students and I built our community. I found I could link much of what I was seeing and doing (and the child’s view and actions as well) to activity theory. Like Vygotsky (1987) and later, Wertsch (1991), and Graue (1993), I was able to focus on intention and motive precisely because the actions of the children and my responses to those actions
were accumulating day by day. In the course of my study, this simple but undeniable fact kept surfacing. My intentions and actions were directly connected to the intentions and actions of my students. The relationship, and its recursive and reflective nature, that was established as the year progressed, was a source of living theory for me.

Because Vygotsky believed that shared meanings are constructed in context and reconstructed many times until they approximate conventional cultural meanings (1987), I speculated that a year long look at community building could illuminate some of the principles involved in establishing shared meanings with kindergartners. (Bedrova & Leong, 1996) were echoing Vygotsky when they stated that “some social contexts are more conducive to the development of higher mental functions.” The social context I was beginning to see in my classroom showed signs of compromise and negotiation, two higher
mental functions that co-construction demands. With the complexity of building a community within a particular context surfacing, and in an effort to understand how the culture of this particular community of learners was emerging, I looked for other theories that might describe it.

**Awareness of Context**

Whereas Corsaro noted that a “linear view of learning” (p. 287), would not adequately convey his context, I was worried about describing the cacophony of voice and story (Richardson, 2000) in mine. This loud, background noise circulated through my journals and overflowed into the perspective I was bringing to the analysis of the research.

Voice and story are metaphors that connote individual and group dialogue, introspection, verbal outpourings, the duality of teacher/researcher roles, and the complex world of the classroom.
Richardson (2000) helped me sort through the seemingly conflicting sounds by offering an ethnographic practice that was both “creative and analytic.” She viewed creation and analysis as compatible.

Creative analytic practice (CAP) ethnography describes practices that are both creative and analytic. Those holding the dinosaurian belief that ‘creative’ and ‘analytic’ are contradictory and incompatible modes are standing in the path of a meteor. They are doomed for extinction. (p. 930)

The ethnography that Richardson was describing added another mountain to my landscape. I needed to find a way to keep the child/teacher voice intertwined as the story of the data emerged.

Creative and analytic described the work I hoped to do. Ethnographic use of photographs and interpretive narrative could illustrate and explain some of the surface elements visible in the construction of a community.

Since writing is a process of discovery, I was encouraged to accept and nurture my own voice as researcher/teacher telling our
story of community building. Rather than worry about getting it right, Richardson (2000) argued for “getting it differently contoured and nuanced.” I saw the contours forming as community was being co-created. I needed the type of writing that would illuminate that process. Her “writing stories” (Richardson, 1997) are narratives about contexts in which the writing is produced. In this study, the shape I give the text is situated within my personal history, research interests, 30 year practice as an early childhood educator, and the lives of this particular group of children. Integrating those elements and finding a way to put my Self into the record of community formation with kindergartners, could fill in the landscape a bit more.

Graue & Walsh in Studying Children in Context (1998), advised “researchers (to) think of children as living in specific settings, with specific experiences and life situations.” (p. 5). I knew they were talking about my students, my learning community, and my school. I
started paying attention to the intentions and motivation that I saw daily. I wanted to give the environment a texture that would suggest co-construction. I wanted to document and interpret the child and teacher’s influence on that construction. However, those intentions and motivations were hidden at times within the individual agendas of the child and teacher and the shifting complexities of our life together in the classroom. Yet, they were also revealed in the actions that characterized the roles we both assumed as the year progressed.

Conducting a qualitative study is like studying the topography of a land mass: a teacher can love a landscape for a lifetime and it will still hide secrets from her. Paradoxically, I centered my study on revealing the secrets the community held, secrets that I had intentionally helped to co-construct, but which were not totally visible and available at first glance. Invisible elements that bound a group of people together in the pursuit of building a learning community became
tangible with observation, participation, and interpretation by teacher and child.

Graue & Walsh (1999) pointed out that interpretive research focused on children in context is still underdeveloped. I took that as a challenge and followed their lead toward other contextualized and situated studies: Kantor & Fernie (1989), examining the way conversations in a preschool population were created at group times; Walsh, Tobin, & Graue (1993), sifting through the changing dynamics of interpretive voice issues; and Wentworth (in Cole, 1996, p. 142), describing context as culture “. . . the situation and time bounded arena for human activity. It is a unit of culture.” Many of the stories I tell are discrete points in time, units of a culture, that were co-created by child and teacher.

Descriptions by child and teacher are rooted in specific moments, frequently captured by talk or photo, and revisited by both
actors in the course of the study. The recursive nature of my work with young children in turn, influenced the larger context in which we were living. The learning area, the school, and the extended community surrounding us (parents, staff, and volunteers of various ages and affiliations) provided a backdrop for the action of community building to be connected to a greater world beyond our walls. Bronfenbrenner (1975) saw these levels of context from an “ecological” perspective. The “enduring environment” which is referred to as the “child’s ecology” consists of two concentric layers . . . “the upper layer and most visible is the immediate setting actually containing the child.” (p. x.) In my study that is analogous to the physical space, materials, people, and activities that change during the process of co-constructing community. The second layer, Bronfenbrenner (1975) describes, which supports and surrounds the first, “includes geographic and institutional systems that effect the child.” (p. xi).
The extended neighborhood and theoretical positions of the school embracing us, helped our community exist.

These theories and perspectives (and further nuances of them) influenced my context and point of view. They gave me a place to stand and a springboard into the reflexive role I had to play as the community was being constructed. These ideas created a reactive and recursive flow of dialogue that spilled out into my practice and influenced the discourse among children who were engaged in co-creating the landscape of a caring community.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

*Characterizing the Study: Interpretive Traditions*

This dissertation is an ethnography embedded in what Erickson (1986) describes as the interpretive tradition. Making community-building actions visible in that context demands flexibility and according to Erickson (1986, p. 121) “using interpretive methods while acting as a participant/observer (teacher/researcher) are most appropriate” when one needs to know more about:

- What is happening in the social setting, specifically?
- What do the actions mean to the actors involved in them?
- How are the events organized in patterns of everyday life?
Erickson’s questions help me place my research within the interpretive tradition and create questions of my own. My initial questions were:

- How do kindergartners build a learning community?
- What effect does teacher selection of activities, formats, and routines have on community building?
- What effect does child initiation of activities have on community building?
- How does community building change through time?
- What assumptions do I have as a teacher/researcher as I approach his study?
- As the year progress, and the community forms, what changes do I see happening in my relationship with my students?

Because the task of discovering specific ways in which teacher/children were constructing a particular community was bound up in meaning making for both, I chose the interpretive approach that Erickson (1986) suggests could help me: make sense of our actions; construct action around our ideas as they emerged; share meanings.
through “face to face interactions”; and create meaning about the actions under reflection. Since the actions and interactions of teacher and children will change over time, the methods I choose to employ to interpret those interactions, may be “reconstructed in response to changes in the researcher’s perceptions, understanding of events, and their organization during the time spent” in the classroom, according to Erickson (1986, p. 121).

Qualitative research, in general, investigates human action and seeks to understand its patterns (Erickson, 1986). I reasoned that a more minute examination of my own classroom and a description of it that would place interested others “inside” a “life world” as it was created, was well within that description. It was clear to me that the larger context of taking an ethnographic approach coupled with 30 years of teaching experience and personal research, would be the frame where my study would reside. At the same time, I was explicitly
using methods drawn from ethnography. And like other ethnographers, much of the rest of my research would depend upon my data, my interaction with it, and my interpretation of it. Drawing upon the perspectives of Frederick Erickson (1986) regarding micro ethnography, I focused my study still further on a particular classroom and its participants for the duration of a school year (2001-2002). Erickson suggested that micro ethnography attempts to specify “the processes of face-to-face interaction in the events.” Face-to-face interactions, and the interpretation of them, reveal the complexities inherent in schooling, according to Erickson. While the complex nature of schooling is well documented, I hoped to add my distinct teacher/researcher’s perspective to it.

I consider the “insider/outsider” dilemma characterized by Kemmis & McTaggart (2000) as “moving between two thought positions.” On one side, I see myself and my understandings about
teaching from a perspective of 30 years. On the other side, I see myself and my practices through the eyes of the researcher, trying to include other perspectives that surround me in the classroom and modify my actions. The multi voiced nature of this kind of dissertation, one that incorporates children’s and other teachers’ perceptions about community-building activities, is emergent. Alternating between the “insider/outsider” mode of operation, the critical perspective I need as a researcher “allows insiders to consider the possible as well as the actual in their social world” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p.590).

Those possibilities, and the methods to uncover them, place my work well within the borders of ethnography. Personal involvement, rather than detachment was appropriate. Empathetic understanding was proper, in this case, as was narrative analysis of the data.

I looked for examples of specific studies conducted in schools for young children, reasoning that some of the methods in them could
guide my methodological choices. As I moved forward, ways of getting at and getting into the data began to surface. Searching databases, asking colleagues, gathering bibliographic information from primary and secondary sources (which included children) added to the established framework. All the while, I was cognizant of the fact (and recording it in my teacher journal) that new information was mixing in with the knowledge base that was already in place. As my interpretive work with the children accelerated, so did the number of potential methods I could use to display those interpretations. Just as the literature review situated my study within the borders of ethnography, the original questions, and Erickson’s description of interpretive research, suggested that I would need to look for answers within a situated methodology. Using the technique of narrative description that Erickson (1986, p. 119) espoused, I could focus my interpretation on “the immediate meanings the actors give the action.”
Singular studies that supported Erickson’s view and my desire to use methods that were flexible enough to meet the young child’s (and new researcher’s) need for continuous dialogue and reflection about the process of co-constructing community were sought. Corsaro (1985), Fernie & Kantor (1988), Graue (1993), and Graue & Walsh (1998) studied contexts in pre schools and elementary schools. Through transcriptions, video tape, and interviews, they underlined the importance of interpreting children’s and teacher’s actions from their perspectives. Green (1999) used the idea of “classrooms as cultures” and shed light on how understanding the constructed nature of life in the classroom could illustrate how “such knowledge is developed across time” (p. 2). I hoped to build on the work of these authors as I considered the intentions and motivations that affect community building with kindergartners.
The interpretive approach to social inquiry has been described as “the study of everyday practical reasoning. It focuses on studying the processes whereby rules that cover interactional settings are constructed.” (Schwandt, 1997, p. 44). The detailed analysis of photographs, field notes, and video tapes that are collected here, fit with Erikson’s and Schwandt’s concept of microethnography. It is the kind of research that focuses on the how of things and arrives at theories about the why. I knew that careful observation and participation in the daily events of life in my kindergarten classroom would help me describe and illuminate the context and thus reveal the “how” of community-building. A partial “why” could also be examined since I was attempting to construct theory that would put intention and motivation in a prime position to be studied by a teacher. Using some of the techniques characteristic of micro ethnography, I attempt to interpret what I see.
Based on the data I’ve collected over a nine month period, September, 2001 to June, 2002, at least two points of view will be displayed, that of the teacher and children. Taking anthropologist Clifford Geertz’ (1973) comment to heart that it is not necessary to know everything in order to understand something, I turn to the consideration of the teacher and child’s role in this community building process.

Situating Myself as Theorizer

Graue’s work, *Studying Children in Context* (1998), convinced me that teachers have practical theories that need examining. This is certainly true when children are the subjects under study. Because so much research has been “done to”, and “done on” the child rather than “done with”, I am seeking a path that focuses on the latter as a conceptual framework. My study includes, highlights, and makes central the theories that children and teachers have about community
building. In order to organize and interpret the documentation, I will use “memoing” (Charmaz, 2000), speculating and hypothesizing about where the data might lead and what it might mean. The memos may help me see patterns over time. They are concrete reminders about specific incidents and observations that will help me to “explicate crucial steps” (p. 502) at the beginning of coding, to create categories inductively from the data rather than from my preconceived hypotheses. Charmaz (2000) helped me realize that the data I collect can be interpreted to construct theory. Constructivist grounded theory, is an “iterative process by which the analyst (me) becomes more and more “grounded” in the data” (Charmaz, 2000) and develops increasingly richer concepts and models of how the action under study really works.
Participation/Observation: Seeing Data From Both Perspectives

My role as a participant/observer is loaded with power. A gap exists between what children do and what I decide to document and make important to the community. As a teacher/researcher, I would be selecting, editing, facilitating, and contributing to their knowledge of community-building while in the process of studying certain aspects of that work. My influence on the scope of the curriculum, the use of time, and the structuring of the events which support the community, is teaching. Graue & Walsh (1998) suggest that the stance of researcher and participant must be carefully negotiated. Through cautious examination of circle talks, child/teacher interpretations, and reflections on specific events that occur over time, I am able to bring a larger part of the children’s perspective to light. Co-construction links learning and teaching for teacher and children.
Participants move between two thought positions: on the one side seeing themselves, their understandings, their practices, and the settings in which they practice from the perspective of insiders who see things in an intimate, even natural way; and, on the other side, seeing themselves, their understandings, their practices, and the setting from the perspective of an outsider who does not share the partiality of the inside view. Alternating between these perspectives gives the insider critical distance -- the seed of the critical perspective that allows insiders to consider the possible as well as the actual. (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p. 590.)

As a teacher/researcher with years of experience in early childhood education, I am wary of putting myself into the picture too often. Knowing that teaching is never neutral, I purposely chose to position myself as an outsider at specific times during the year and was purposeful in my role of supporting the creation of community.

I began by showing the children my journal, which was smaller than theirs and leather bound. I explained that when they saw my journal it meant I was taking notes about how we were building community. I compared my journal writing to “the journals you keep about the fun stuff we do together” (journal entry September, 6, 2001). I asked the children to ask each other for help if they saw me...
writing. I said I was a fast writer but needed a quiet time to think about what I wanted to write. Including my own journal writing within the culture of the community that was forming created a slight shift in it. I was modeling writing for a particular purpose. The children responded by doubling their efforts to write to me about their friends. They were discovering how important the topic was to me.

_Situating the Child as a Co-constructor of Community_

Because co-construction involves other people, situating the child theoretically and practically in this study should also be addressed. Graue & Walsh (1998) consider the child’s perspective when they argue that fieldwork with young children depends on the quality of the relationships developed between researcher and participants. “Sensitivity to individual children’s needs and ideas develops over time” (p. 145). I am equally aware of time’s effect on relationships. Following the suggestion of my advisor, I selected three
child informants, whom I renamed kid reporters. As I met with them throughout the year, I remained observant to their particular needs.

The constructivist model of learning and teaching acknowledges the child as an active meaning maker, who tests theories, and tries to make sense of the world around her. Rather than clay to be molded, or a container waiting to be filled, the child discovers surprising things (like other students and other aspects of schooling) that need understanding. A microethnography with multiple data resources will generate multiple texts (Green & Bloome, 1997, Heath, 1982; Spradley, 1980) that need clarification and interpretation.

William Spradley’s book, Participant Observation (1983), discusses the challenge of walking the line between participant and observer. Because this microethnography was an ongoing process with decisions made on the spot, when and where to observe and what actions to provoke while building community in my classroom, are
decisions that will be increasingly guided by my emerging theoretical framework. I was aware that my biases, knowledge base, practical teaching experience, and points of reference (social constructivism, context as culture, activity theory, multiple intelligence theory, the speculation about emotional intelligence, and the Reggio Emilia model) would affect what I selected as data to analyze and how I interpreted that information.

Spradley’s technique of domain analysis is a tool that will help me to make sense of the data as it accumulates. The domain analysis worksheet and the matrix of questions suggested in his text, and my adaptation of it in Appendix C, has the added benefit of making me conscious of looking with fresh eyes at the landscape I thought I knew.

Making my knowledge problematic will help me look critically at equity issues. For example, on one hand, my power as the researcher and teacher is undeniable. I do and did make decisions that I hope will
move the children toward creating a learning community. I purposely choose particular literary works which increase talk and interpretation about what the nature of community. I used texts that emphasized powerful members co-constructing different communities, too. (See Appendix D for complete list.) I looked for ways to excite and incite conversation about the world the children and I were creating. I am a fully invested participant in this culture at times,

At the same time I expected and embraced the varying degrees of knowledge my class has. I welcomed diversity of thought and action as a key indicator of the rich potential that could, hopefully, support a thriving community. Because I am used to seeing how the particular intelligences are strengthened as kindergartners learn more about each other and more about the academic content circulating through the learning area, my practice incorporates avenues for exploration
based on the seven intelligences that Gardner (1993) described. (See Appendix A).

In my role as observer, I am aware that my knowledge base set the curriculum moving. As the children change the curricular focus, making it more immediate and responsive to their need to know more or know differently, I hover around the edges of the community, structuring reflection through dialogue, using their interest in friends to support the community we were creating.

*Interpretive/Analytic Tools*

When I consider the collaboration strengths children bring to the task of learning and compare it to Vygotsky’s concept of “higher mental functions” (1987), I begin to see the power the children were revealing through their actions and multiple perspectives. Vygotsky believed that shared meanings are constructed in context and reconstructed many times until they approximate conventional cultural
meanings (1987 p. 302). I reasoned that a year-long look at community building could illuminate some of the principles involved in establishing a culture with community as a central value. Vygotsky’s concept of the characteristics of higher mental functions linked content and context for me and suggested the model for the “levels of interaction” which are described in Chapter 4. The kid grid (Figure 4. 14) was designed to promote higher mental functions and may provide the children with yet another visual cue about the work they produce with others. I believe that “some social contexts are more conducive to the development of higher mental functions” (Bedrova & Leong, 1996), and I consciously looked for methods that would make that perspective accessible to my students.

Using Spradley’s Question Matrix (1980, p. 83) methodology, I was able to move into a deeper examination of how key relationships (child to child and teacher to child) are co-constructed. I could observe
the landscape with a rough map in hand and explicitly see how the social context that the children and I were establishing was conducive to learning about ourselves.

Method

Site.

My classroom is in an alternative elementary school in a large, urban district in the Midwest. Children from pre k to fifth grade are assigned to multiage groupings. The staff consists of one principal, 30 teachers, and 5 instructional assistants. There is a part time nurse and counselor. A school psychologist is on call. Visual art, music, and movement are taught by full time specialists. The principal is in her second year at the school replacing a four year principal on medical leave.
As an alternative elementary school, the district randomly selects the students who will fill our school’s classrooms, through the use of a city-wide lottery. Parents must fill out an application form for their child’s inclusion in this lottery. In some cases, applications indicate that a family has reviewed the early childhood program that is in place. Each child, through his or her parent’s actions, has the option of applying to as many as three separate alternative schools. Once chosen, a child can remain in that school until he or she moves on to sixth grade. Each year, as one would expect, most of a school’s openings are in kindergarten.
Figure 3.1: The open space is modified by home base and center designations. A (^) indicates the places of interaction for this study.
The physical arrangement of the learning areas was set in 1975 during the height of the open classroom trend. Consequently, my learning area has three “home bases”, where all sixty-two children and four teachers share the full space. The open area has been modified by bookcases, learning centers, and guided reading group tables. Each smaller area is then arranged according to individual teacher needs and preferences. For example, my home base, is down the stairs at the lower right position on the sketch. For purposes of this study, I have confined my area of observation to the places labeled with a (\^). I focus on the action that occurs overtime in those parts of the learning area.

All children have access to the learning centers and spaces within my home base throughout the school day. However, I consciously chose to include only the interactions of my students while they were working in those spaces. I reasoned that since I am seeking to
interpret a micro world, I could shrink the field of action to half of the entire learning area and only focus on the interactions of the children participating in the study.

Further modifications to the site were instituted three years ago when a special needs unit of pre-k children was assigned to the area. These children, possessing varying degrees of talents and needs, are fully included in the learning area. Occupational, hearing and speech, and physical therapists visit several days each week and use the shaded “teacher room” at the top right position on the sketch, for therapy sessions.

_Sample._

Because I am working in a public school, the participants of my study were assigned to me based on gender-balance. Ten boys and eleven girls were assigned by the principal. I had no control over the assignments. This year, 2001-2002, eighty percent of the school’s
student population is African-American. Of the sixty-two
kindergartners who were chosen, forty-seven, or 75%, are on the free
or reduced lunch option. My own class, or “homebase,” is made up of
twenty-one kindergartners -- two Caucasian children, two bi-racial
children, and seventeen African-American children. Eleven children are
on the free or reduced lunch plans and nine are paying full price.

I met the majority of the children on the first day of school although I
met their parents at a “Get Acquainted” meeting a few days before
school began.

At the “Get Acquainted” meeting, I requested and obtained full
participation for this research from the parents. (see Appendices D, E,
and F for phone script and letters of consent forms). All of my
kindergartners are included in the sample, except one, who was
excluded from the study by informed parental request. All of the
names of the children have been changed. Some of the children
selected their own “names,” and others I assigned. Because I wanted to focus on community-building, all of the children participated, to varying degrees, in the documentation and interpretation of the activities we pursued as we co-constructed the community. An important consideration was providing time for child reflection to occur.

I wanted to include a variation of the “typical” kindergartner in my class, identified as a “kid reporter.” Using Glesne’s *Becoming Qualitative Researchers* (1999) text as a guide, the kid reporters were selected as representatives who cut across different ethnic and economic backgrounds: Allan, white, two parent home, upwardly mobile; Jaz, biracial, two parent home, lower middle class; Donald, African-American, single parent home, lower middle class. They were already five years old when the study began in September, 2001. Once a month, I will meet with the children and informally interview them to
gain insight into the way they are interpreting community-building actions.

*Data Sources.*

I drew interpretive information from multiple data sources in order to tell a detailed story about lives that were fluid and changeable. Corsaro (1985) suggested that taking a different look at the data through “theoretical sampling” would allow the researcher to shift questions and approaches to fit what was happening in the classroom. “The nature of ethnographic research demands that sampling procedures be reactive to developments in the course of the research” (p.34). I used memos to construct a theory trail, guide my interpretive inquiry, and reflect on the daily entries of interactions contained in field notes. Reviewing those memos helped me know what other data I needed to gather.
Field notes.

Field notes beginning in September, 2001, and continuing until June, 2002, showed the day-to-day life of the community as it was developing. I used field notes as a place to record direct observations about the children’s actions. Field notes accompanied the taped conversations during circle talks. Field notes listed the physical surroundings, moods, and dispositions of the kid reporters as they reflected on questions that arose from the circle talks. Field notes were collected in tandem during video taped discussions with teacher teammates. In brief, the entire year’s discoveries, fruitful trails and dead ends are chronicled in this collection. By mid-year, I was searching for a way to make sense of field notes that were now filling two notebooks. Categories for observational notes that were based on Corsaro’s (1985) work, and suggested earlier by Straus (1964), and Schatzman and Strauss (1973), helped me sort out my own tentative
thoughts about the process of coding field notes. I modified their methods as I created a simplified field note format of my own, using the following categories and codings with my initial field notes.

**ON** Observational Notes describe events as they happen daily. Not much interpretation here; often linked to audio or written transcriptions for clarity.

**MN** Methodological Notes suggest ways of furthering my study. I give myself advice in these notes, pose questions for later inquiry, and list ways to make the research work (i.e. be relevant) for the participants involved in its construction.

**TN** Theoretical Notes represent attempts to develop the significance of a set of field notes. I connect, across readings and study, to some general theories about relationships, for example. I used these notes as referents; trail markers if you will, to get through the maze of data that was accumulating. When I read just the TN, for example, I gained information that helped me understand how my methods were linked to the theories circulating in my mind.
Teacher journals.

I used a teacher journal from early August, 2001 to August, 2002. It became a ready record of my feelings, perceptions, and inquiries that guided my collection of other field notes, suggested ways to think about particular incidents in greater detail, and reflect on the process of being a participant/observer. Using memos to track my perceptions about the changing role I had in the classroom, encouraged me to seek out alternative views of teacher/researcher actions.

Children’s journals.

I collected a child’s journal at particular times during the year in order to monitor the effect that our community building had on her. Jaz wrote about particular events and showed beginning attempts at understanding what it meant to be a friend in our community. Looking at child work further supported my assertion that children were capable and competent documenters of community-building in their own
right. Her first understanding about what it takes to build a community shows up in December, 2001 (see Appendix G for writing samples). This class of kindergartners wrote every day for 179 days. Much of their work speculates about friends and how to get them. They wonder and worry in their journals about how they will fit in and who will like them -- words that came to define what community meant to them.

*Photographs.*

In October, photographing activities became more important for the children and me. The digital camera was an additional concrete reminder that “we would be looking for ways we help each other” (journal entry October 15, 2001). Other visual cues which helped the children know that I was in the “observer role” included:

- Posting the photographs that teacher/child would be interpreting that day.
• Showing my journal entries on the overhead when they pertained to a circle talk.
• Drawing pictures on the chart that indicated who would be doing what with the laptop and my assistance.

The critical distance that the cues provide may help me stand next to and in front of the child simultaneously.

By October, 2001, I added photographs to my growing list of data sources. As the children increased their knowledge about our community, as well as their knowledge about the digital camera, their photographs, and my photographs, served as concrete reminders about the work we were doing together. It became an additional way to capture the process of co-construction of community in which that the children and I were engaged. Photographing extensively became a visual field note that we both could interpret. My teacher journal indicates that I was looking for a way to make the photographs more representative of the child’s perception of community. As time went
on, seven children including the three kid reporters, shared the camera work.

I also photographed and sorted photos into categories with the help of Spradley’s matrix of questions (1989). Child initiated and teacher selected activities were included as part of our documentation about the process. The photographs became a way to provoke discourse for children and teachers. What we could see, we could remember. What we could remember, we could reconstruct and interpret. Through the reconstruction period of data analysis, I started hearing the meanings the children and I gave to the photographs. The photographs, present in the documentation of the community building activities that we pursued, helped me see the complex life and voices that were emerging around this issue. The photos helped the children recreate “fun times” with friends and retell stories that bound the community together. This visual
narrative (Harper, 2000) strengthened the written one and elicited cultural information that might have gone unnoticed in the busy world of kindergarten. As it was, the children and I became more adept at describing that world as the study progressed because we had a “reality” in hand to discuss. The interpretation of the photographs increased when a process called “screening” was added.

Screening.

By December, 2001, “screening” became my word, and eventually our word, for looking at the photos on the laptop, talking about the photos, and adding interpretation about them. In this process, I acted as scribe and wrote the children’s thoughts and feelings for them. The screening process was conducted during rest time, recess time, and guided reading group work. Screening texts were hand written in field notes and displayed in the documentation.
that surrounded our study of community. This process continued until the end of the year.

Kid Reporters.

Kid reporters, mentioned earlier in this chapter, was the appellation I gave to what Spradley (1980) described as informants.

The kid reporters met with me from September, 2001 to June, 2002. Unlike field notes, teacher journal, and photographs, the kid reporter interviews were scheduled and periodic rather than continuous. I would select some of the dialogue from my field notes that struck a cord with the children or me during a circle talk. I would formulate specific questions that guided the interview with the kid reporters and kept the interviews short. The questions I used for the kid interviews were:

• What do you think community means?

• How do you make friends?

• What happens if someone won’t be your friend?
• Have you ever felt left out of a group?

• How did that make you feel?

• What does “taking care of others” mean to you?

• Who’s a leader in our class?

• What do leaders do for others?

An additional data source was created from these interviews with the kid reporters. A teacher focus group was established in November, 2001.

*Teacher Focus group.*

This focus group of teacher teammates further explained and described the definitions of community building that were emerging from my work with the children. I took videos of the focus group meetings, which helped me track the comments and communications between and among teachers, and often led to my formulating new questions to consider with my students. A complete list of questions
can be found in Appendix H. Photographs and interpretation, that were used for sense making and panel documentation (Malaguzzi, 1994), were visible in the classroom and co-constructed with the children. Documentation influenced the topics I selected for the focus group discussions. The pattern of using kid reporter’s words and the photographs that were posted to provoke discussion and critical thinking with the teacher focus group, reveal complex nuances about what it means to be co-constructor in our community.

Figure 3.2 lists the methods of data collection that begin in 2001 and end in 2002. The data sources are arranged in chronological order down the left column. The data sources overlap each other at times. The teacher and children’s journals for example, begin early in the year. The children’s journals are “sampled” at discreet times while the teacher journal is ongoing. Figure 3.2 shows that overlapping data is “natural” in an interpretive study. Since the study seeks to uncover
emerging themes about community-building, as they happen, it is realistic to expect concurrent as well as separate data collection points.

I use “begin, middle, and end” of the year as headings on Figure 3.1 to reflect the flow of data as it was collected. When I first began to sort and classify the mounds of data that had accumulated, the data sources showed a path across the year. The arrows in Figure 3.2, indicate ongoing collection of data while the x marks specific days within the school year that particular data was collected.
Figure 3.2: Data sources for 2001-2002.

Projects.

During the last part of the year, projects emerge as an evolving venue where community-building is played out. Conversely, the state of our community made it feasible to take on projects as another way of examining the actions among children and between teacher and children later in the year. I discuss projects separately because the process that helps projects develop also led to a different tool that
helped me see the individual’s impact on the community. Project design showed the connection between academic outcomes and social interaction in the community.

A project can be linked to theme development or the habit of creating webs of thought that guide exploration of a particular topic. The child, with teacher assistance and encouragement, finds a question or theme that invites a more in-depth study. Projects in my classroom can be individual or group work that centers on examining a wider range of information than first presented. For kindergartners, projects can develop from art class, theme based explorations (dinosaurs, traffic, new playground construction, etc.), or special interests. Because projects could provide me with more information about how (or if) children were involving their friends in the work, I set up guidelines that became a source of data about relationships in particular. During the
project formation stage, I was conscious of repeating the same steps
with each child that initiated a project query.

1. The child made the inquiry through drawing or writing in their
   personal journals. I read journals daily and responded with
   questions that would help the child think about what she wanted
to do.
2. The child, with assistance, would select two books about the
   topic under consideration.
3. The child would meet with me during recess and discuss how the
   presentation of the project could develop. The format was
   negotiated and the materials were provided by the teacher.

While I followed this procedure from mid to the end of the year,
only five children selected this way of learning more about their topics
of interest. I developed a Kid Grid (Figure 4.14) that tracked the
project process. Examined in greater depth in chapter 4, the Grid
infers several possibilities that made interactions and relationships
within an academic context, more visible. I initially thought of the
project process as one more way of showing how the children’s
intentions became known. With reflection and hindsight, I can now see how it illustrates the individual’s impact on the community building at hand.

Data Analysis

The first question, “How do kindergartners build a learning community?” is partially answered by the methods I chose to employ. In part, the search for methods to make community-building visible is one distinct focus of this study. The second question, “What effect does teacher selection of activities, formats, and routines have on community building?” comes from the first and guides consideration of my role in the process. Stated another way, in what ways did I help the children figure out, for themselves and with each other, how one ought to act in this community that was evolving?
The second question returns me to constructivist grounded theory and domain analysis. Becoming more familiar with the theory and analyzing the spheres of influence within our community through domain analysis, made deeper implications and more refined analyses of the same data possible. The methods associated with constructivist grounded theory and domain analysis helps me get at the themes of intention and motivation in the community-building process.

*Constructivist Grounded Theory: Revealing Multiple Layers of Meaning*

Constructivist grounded theory recognizes that categories, concepts, and the theoretical level of analysis emerge from the researcher’s interactions within the field and questions about the data, (Charmaz, 2002.) That means, that as I wrestle with interpreting the actions I see before me, another part of my mind is considering where that interpretation might fit in the scope of the study. Since I am
interested in teacher and child interpretations, treating my “write up” as an exercise in construction frees me from knowing everything. I have the pleasure of seeing the “facts” of the community unfold. I have the obligation to let them do so using constructivist theory.

Relying on the interactive process of documentation, child/teacher interpretation, I can frame the action and confer meaning on it. The theoretical sampling described earlier in this chapter, does more than move me to the data one more time. It also helps me “study experience from the standpoint of those who live it” (Charmaz, 2000, p.522). The kinds of categories that emerge under a constructivist framework are multi-leveled and at times, dense. While my study does not pretend to examine the full possibilities of theoretical sampling, my beginning steps with it convince me of its worth.

Memoing, which Charmaz (2000) and Richardson (2000) used, allowed me to consider how the components of grounded theory could work as
reminders of data that were both practical and theoretical in nature. I posted them within field notes and journal reflections where they served as markers for particular thoughts I had about the action I was seeing and interpreting.

*Domain Analysis: Structural Questions That Guide Interpretation*

The action multiplied when the co-construction of documentation began. It would have been easy to miss some of the subtle and implicit meanings the children were giving their actions and, impossible to catch them all. Their explanations, that became coded as intentions and motivations, increased as the study progressed. I returned to Spradley’s domain analysis (1980) worksheet as a way of listing and remembering what kind of parts were leading to the whole and how the whole of community building was made up of discrete parts. For example, while I was looking for child initiated activities that I considered a part of building a learning community, I was drawn to
formulating specific structural questions that would explicate its
effect in our community. Considering where and when the child
initiates problem solving activities (Appendix C continued) assisted
self-reflection about my role in “allowing” it to happen. When I looked
at the writing process, and in particular, child journal writing as a
source of “living” data, I could recall the ways children started the
writing process and project an interpretation about how that process
changed over time.

*Question Matrix: Organizing the Questions, Narrowing the Lens*

Spradley’s question matrix (1980) helps to locate cultural
phenomena in time, space, and social interaction. Using the matrix of
questions, the domain analysis worksheets, and a teacher journal, I was
able to track the way a particular problem was solved. For example,
identifying how collaboration among children was supported (see
complete matrix in Appendix C) led me to an examination of the daily
schedule. From that reference point, I started re-constructing (and co-
constructing) the many ways children could change the schedule to
more fully meet their need of “working with friends.” When I
considered an related question on the matrix: What kind of
relationship do I seek with children? My answers included a “critical”
and “challenging” stance that became actualized when project
development began. Returning to the matrix of questions, keeping it
current with the deeper analyses that were appearing in my
methodological and theoretical memos, forced me to look at our
community with a wider lens, one informed by theory as well as action
and interaction.

Since the matrix gave me a system of organizing the data as it
emerged, the analysis of it was made less threatening to this nascent
researcher. I could look at the forests and the trees using the
question matrix and the domain analysis worksheets. I could narrow my
scope and see only child initiated activities or widen the view to see the
effect those activities had on our community. The forms helped me
function as participant/observer sometimes (and simultaneously as a
thorizer/practitioner). At other times, the teacher/researcher role
directed the course of analysis.

Narrative Analysis: Developing the Data Story

Childhood is a continual and continuing construction and the
dynamic nature/image of the child is central to conceptualizing the
scope of my research. As Schwandt (1994) advises: “to understand
this world of meaning one must interpret it.” The methods emphasized
in constructivist grounded theory work support my quest to reveal the
image of a child who is powerful and fully capable of making meaning in
collaboration with others.

Making meaning with and for others is exactly the purpose of
micro ethnography. Richardson (2000) sees ethnographic projects as
“humanly situated, always filtered through human eyes and human perceptions, bearing both the limitations and the strengths of human feelings.” (p. 937) I looked for and found consistent meanings about community that evolved over time. Through teacher and child journals; the child and teacher talk that emerged during circle discussions; the interpretations of photographs that offered other possible explanations about the action that was captured, I sought the voices of a particular community as it was being formed. Documentation and the tools that accompany this example of micro ethnographic work, gave the child an appropriate way to handle the artifacts and tell the story of community building from their perspective and over time.

Analyzing the story or narrative in a chronological way is a procedure that Polkinghorne (1995) describes as “organizing data elements into a coherent developmental account” (p.15). He argues
that the “synthesizing of the data rather than a separation of it into its parts” presents an “analytic whole.”

Seeking to relate events, relationships, and actions in my classroom to one another lets the story of our year together emerge. In explaining how the community came to be, I am following Polkinghorne’s advice.

The analytic development of a story from the gathered data involves recursive movement from the data to an emerging theme. The creation of the text involves the to-and-fro movement from parts to whole that is involved in comprehending a final text. (p. 16)

Polkinghorne (1995) also makes it clear that the protagonists, the teacher and children, have “motivations, purposes, and interests” (p. 17) that bear scrutiny. In my study, co-constructed narratives about the actions of the child and teacher have a prominent position. How each party alters the action, and describes the ramifications of such change, is examined through the many eyes present in circle
talks, photographic documentation, and interpretation. It is also examined, yet again, from my researcher’s point of view.

After the initial reading of a transcript which focused on action that provoked change, I purposely wrote about my interest in the action. The purpose of the narrative in this instance, was to take an “unusually observant participant’s” viewpoint. I deliberately placed myself “inside the scene of action” (Erickson, 1986, p.157) and made my narration immediate, when in fact, the action was over before I came on the scene.

The fine-grained inquiry which characterizes micro ethnography, includes actions that “get at the study of everyday practical reasoning as the study of the processes whereby rules that cover interaction settings are constructed.” (Schwandt, 1997, p. 44). That means that within the life of the community I was helping to co-construct, certain methods could emerge that had the potential to show interaction.
Telling the story of interaction within a community and analyzing how its members moved in and out of the story as they co-constructed it, is the essence of narrative analysis.

*Trustworthiness and Complications*

Children and teacher have differing perceptions about what happened at any given moment. The flux of normal classroom life is usually not troubled by claims of validity. In fact the typical position of teacher as the ultimate authority precludes any discussion of what is valid in the classroom. What my study seeks to examine is not the typical or generalizable. Focusing on the relationships that exist between a particular teacher and her children, and searching for ways to interpret intentions and motivations for teaching and learning, leads me closer to what Lincoln & Guba (2000) among others, consider to be valid: an ethical relationship. “The way in which we know is most
assuredly tied up with both *what* we know and our *relationships* with those we study” (p. 182). On that note, I can stand since the role of relationships in child initiated activity and teacher selected activity is central to understanding how this particular community was co-constructed.

Lincoln & Guba (1985) list criteria for trustworthiness which seem to be compatible with my study. “Credibility, applicability, dependability, and confirmability are legitimate for critical evaluators” and can be used to argue the usefulness of stories that are created in a particular context and told in a particular way. The credibility of my findings depends on what Lincoln & Guba (1985) call “trustworthiness.” Methods of data collection that I selected to uncover community building activities also illustrate the credible nature of this kind of ethnographic research: the length of the school year, the persistent observation of child initiated and teacher selected activities in field
notes, the reflection in child and teacher journals, photographs
continually screened for interpretation and intention, kid reporter
reactions to the events swirling about our life world, and the member
checks provided by the teacher focus group, support my contention
that my data is credible. Those elements clearly lead to a multifaceted
picture of the community: many voices, many sources, and different
interpretations about the actions under consideration do much to
strengthen the teacher and children’s right to be heard and seen.

Michelle Fine (2000) writing “cautions” about the recursive state of
social analysis, asks herself and other researchers to address, “Have I
deployed multiple methods so that very different kinds of analyses can
be constructed?” (p. 127). Within the analysis of this study, children
and teachers stories are shifting. Recognizing the mutations which
change the course of action and talk in a kindergarten, and theorizing
about why the change is occurring, is one more aspect of credible research.

Other issues of trustworthiness must be considered as well. Lincoln & Guba (1985) cite prolonged engagement and persistent observation as crucial. “If prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth” (p. 304). It is equally important to select methods that compliment each other and add to that feeling of credibility. Using constructivist grounded theory methods that include memoing and repeated interaction with field notes and participants, increases alternative interpretations. Those alternatives, whether confirming or disconfirming the study, enhances the trustworthiness of the work.

Other criteria can be used for determining the validity of a qualitative study. Issues of voice (who is heard and who is silenced) also speaks to the trustworthiness of the study. “Voice” as described
by Rosanna Hertz (1997) is tentative and problematic, but identifying
the dilemma and employing methods to explore it increases credibility.

A struggle to figure out how to present the author’s self while simultaneously
writing the participants’ accounts and representing their selves. Voice has
multiple dimensions. (pp. xi-xii)

I took methodological steps so that the child’s voice is heard. Through
transcriptions, child journals, kid reporter interviews, and the
photographic screening processes with children and teachers, the
multiple dimensions of community building are revealed and articulated.

Trustworthiness can also be examined if the researcher admits
the biases she brings to the study. In this case, I am influenced by long
term exposure to the relationships I am trying to describe. When I
display and interpret the nuts and bolts of community building in this
particular context, I must expose the theories and perspectives that
guide my thinking. My own voice must be credible.
Fuller disclosure on the “voice” issue is assured when I subject my data to reflexivity and scrutinize my role as a researcher in a context that I helped establish and in which I continue to work. When I interrogate not only the data but myself as the collector, organizer, and disseminator of that data, a clearer picture emerges. How a study meets and aligns those researcher roles is another sign of trustworthiness according to Lincoln (1995). It is my hope that the struggle with the many voices in this study, and how to represent them, will make my work authentic, and therefore, trustworthy.

My role as teacher/researcher has additional limitations that are uncovered as the analysis of my data goes forward. I am a translator of child action that can never be seen as “The Truth.” My own experiences, knowledge, theoretical dispositions, and the way I collected the data preclude that claim. Attempting to make meaning with and for the child, moving back and forth through various levels of
meanings of the documentation, is a test of self. The landscape of my life influences and transforms the topography of my classroom. It provides favorable ground for a community to be co-constructed, on site.

*Interpreting With the Child*

The kid reporters helped me see how the community building activities that the class pursued were linked personally to each of them. Rather than case studies, the reporters were barometers that I used to guide further instruction as well as future research. Allan, needed affirmation that the work he was doing was excellent. Jaz wanted more time with me. Donald was resistant at the beginning of the year. He viewed my questions as intrusive. When I talked to him, I consciously shortened the interview. In this way, I was able to adapt my questioning and procedures to fit the individual child.
As Spradley (1979) noted, the purpose of a good interview is to discover what questions to ask. This is important for me because the comments and ideas the child shares shapes what the child knows and thinks, two different ways of looking at intention and motivation.

Graue & Walsh (1998) caution the researcher to “leave room for children to teach us what we need to know, while providing them with questions to spur them on to do just that.” (p.147) Recognizing that teaching and learning are compatible and reciprocal relationships, the children in this study, become co-constructors, not only of the community, but of the research itself. Two questions that I considered previously, were made more explicit during kid reporter interviews. One question was methodologically centered; the other theoretically informed.

1. How could I track the motivation and the intent the children were bringing to community building activities?
2. In what ways did I help them figure out--for themselves and with each other--how one ought to act in this community that was evolving?

*The Recursive Nature of Interpretation: Favoring Emerging Data*

How to track the motivation and the intent the children (and teacher) were bringing to the process of community building, developed from the Reggio work I have been engaged in since 1993. In the book, *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education* (1996), documentation is described as an “analysis of the processes of learning and the interconnections between children’s different ideas, activities, and representations.” (p.122). Documentation about specific projects, activities, educational approaches, and the steps in the processes accompany panels of teacher interpretation. Further, documentation is a way to let parents, colleagues, and interested others become aware of the
children’s potential. Using the tools of documentation (photography, children’s work, descriptions about projects, child and teacher interpretation of the photos and events) “all add to the understanding of the life of the school” (Malaguzzi, 1995). The thick descriptions of the children’s actions, pushed me toward exploring the meanings and intentions that directed them. Documentation, and the interpretation of the actions represented therein, became the unit of analysis that describes the environment the children and I created together.

Since I am viewing documentation as co-created data, I used its tools to emphasize the interactive nature of the classroom. I focused on the ways the children and I negotiated the descriptions of the photographs, for example. To further emphasize the interactive aspects, child and teacher interpretations are represented in a half page format with a distinct font chosen by the children and subsequently used for all public documentation. Displayed together,
the interpretations convey the dynamic nature of many of our exchanges about the community we were forming.

I also subjected the multiple perspectives that were surfacing to domain analysis. I looked for parts that lead to the whole. I used the whole to explicate the parts. I adapted Spradley’s question matrix to record the ever growing list of questions generated by my work with the children. As the year progressed, two themes emerged as central to the concept of intention and motivation: child initiated activities and teacher selected activities. These cover terms explained the interaction and negotiation inherent in this particular community. As Graue (1998) warns, “getting at intention and motive is not a simple, straightforward task.” (p.150) I followed her advise to watch children’s interactions closely, listen to their explanations of their actions, and respect their voice. Documentation, in this study, applies
to all the data sources I used. It is implied in the descriptors in Figure 3.1, here it is made explicit. Documentation methodology helped me fill in the question matrix also. It kept the spotlight on the child’s interpretation of the community while simultaneously suggesting other possible explanations for me to consider.

The rich descriptions that are indications of interpretive research, and in this case, micro ethnographic, add to the complex nature of the researcher and the researched. Favoring emerging data, and through it grounding theory, is tricky. I added the teacher teammate focus group to give depth to the understandings that the children and I were beginning to see as our community building progressed. This form of member checking was used in a new way. My colleagues responded to questions that were raised during my interviews with the kid reporters. Frequently, both parties answered the same question. At other times, I quoted directly from child
interpretations that were displayed in the classroom and fashioned a discussion around it. I wanted to know what my teammates were seeing. I used them as a sounding board, an ad hoc advisory group, that could examine issues in a depth that was unavailable to the kid reporters. The transcriptions of our taped discussions broadened the interpretation field. It brought new eyes to the perceptions I had about the community as it took shape. I consciously chose the focus group format to add credibility to the documentation that I was producing and interpreting with my class. Graue & Walsh (1998), “Because interpretive research comes out of interactions among people, role construction is an ongoing process.” (p.76.) Teachers and children constructed and reconstructed their roles as the year progressed.

The biases, perspectives, and ethical stances revealed in the focus group transcripts do much to support the varied methods I used in this study. Because there is no recipe for this kind of research, I
was particularly careful to offer other looks at the same data as it emerged. In the context of community building, what helped and what hurt it, many definitions of community were explained and examined. Using the focus group and the child/teacher interpretation of photographs, as well as the child work relating to it, I increased the chances for readers to see what I saw -- children who were capable of sharing their experiences with adults, and adults who were capable of learning from those sharings.

Berry Mayhall (1994), elaborates this point in her discussion about the differences between adults and children:

The level of (a child's) powerlessness varies according to how the adults in the specific social settings conceptualize children and childhood. Childhood, it is argued here, is not experienced as one set of relationships; rather its character in time and place is modified by adult understanding, in those times and places, of what children are. (p. 116)

Getting at adult perceptions about children as community builders, considering the child’s voice as capable and strong, and communicating the biases that I have as I reconstruct this story, are
important ethical considerations of the data presented here. The narratives that I tell in the documentation process, the interpretation with and for the child, and the perceptions that I have about each will certainly be discernible. Siding with Erickson (1976), who valued face-to-face interactions and Graue & Walsh (1998), who looked at child and teacher in context specific ways, the familiarity I have with the children can be seen as positive and natural.

Recently, Fook (2000), argued that researchers must recognize how their perspectives color the data collection as well as the analysis. Her focus on practice as a way of influencing theory maximizes “the number of perspectives available” (p.88). I would add that recursive opportunities to interpret actions based on those multiple perspectives, adds to the credibility of this study. The field note observations, the co-constructed documentation (including photographs and screening processes), teacher and child journals, kid
reporter reflections, and the teacher focus group videos allow multiple interpretations to surface, interpretations that are captured in the narrative findings chapter to follow.

The data sources I collect and develop with the children will assist me in making the transition to data analysis. Throughout the school year, memos in my field notes, photographic screenings, teacher and child journal entries, and interpretations of teacher and child actions, will move me closer to considering how to tell the story of these detailed descriptions, these “concrete particulars” that Geertz (1986) discussed in his ethnographic work. Using experience in the field, first hand accounts of the events that shaped our community, and imposing a chronological framework on the narrative, established the findings I now discuss.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

As I worked with the data, shifting points of view, intention, and motive clamored to be “heard.” Teacher/researcher voice and child voice moved in and out of prominence as the year progressed. Kid reporter comments connected with teacher focus group discussions and teacher journal insights. Those elements of my analysis added additional layers upon which I needed to reflect.

I decided to use a chronological sequence of the events because time, and the passage of it, laid out a trail I could follow as the community was being formed. Using simple headings (beginning, middle and end of the year) helped me sort voices and actions into broad
categories for initial analysis. The more descriptive subheadings served as guideposts on the journey. Key phrases linked interpretation of the events to the reflections that surfaced in discussions and activities throughout the year.

Reading them first may help the audience appreciate the length and breath of the trip. The narrative vignettes that bracket the year, offer vivid portrayals of the feelings that informed those crucial times.

The Year Begins

August 31, 2001, 9 A.M. The year begins with rain; excited teachers and nervous children. As we enter our large learning area, I can see that many of the children are wary, exuberant, silent, or mystified. They have never seen a place like this. They do not know me. They do not know each other. We edge our way toward coat hooks, find names on tote trays, put lunches away, and sit in a circle on the floor. They are absolutely quiet. All eyes are on me.
At the start of the study, I hoped that illuminating and
describing the kind of work children and teachers do in the course of
forming relationships would become visible. I wanted to show the
progression of community-building through the partnerships that I
expected would emerge. I reasoned that paying attention (and teaching
the children to pay attention) to how and why they formed the
friendships that would change and evolve over time, we could better
examine our classroom community. Establishing a way to interpret
actions, defining norms for our community, and exploring the
interdependencies inherent in reciprocal relationships were some of
ideas I was considering as the year began.

A few days before the school year began, I talked with my
children’s parents about some of the research I had been reading. I
cited Graue’s and Walsh’s (1995) caution to “leave room for children
to teach us what we need to know.” (p.147) I described the daily
schedule with special emphasis on circle talks. I explained that these circle talks were one way I would know what the children were thinking.

I told the parents that I was collecting child views of how a classroom community was going to be created and that circle talks and photographs would help me tell the child’s story of that process. I said that circle talks were a crucial element in the building of our community. The talks helped bind child and teacher together in common purpose.

Circle talks shaped intentions by making them understandable to everyone. Adaptable for “clearing the air” as well as for establishing rules and norms, circle talks would be used for information-gathering, curriculum planning, and motivational chats. As the school year progressed, I hoped that the children would take on more responsibility for our classroom and suggested that the children would be able to “pick circle talks,” or topics, that they thought were necessary to
discuss. I also knew that establishing a specific time for these conversations to happen would greatly increase the chances of child participation/ownership in the process. (see Appendix B, Daily Schedule.)

Taking on the responsibility for circle topics was only one way the children would participate in building this community. Tracking their relationships, with each other and with me, was equally important. As the data accumulated, building relationships became the driving factor of my research, the focus of many circle talks, the everyday analysis of teacher/child thought and action, and the barometer that eventually indicated how our community was being forged.

*First Circle: Stating Intentions to Make Friends*

I adapted and used Maclure’s and Walker’s (2000) transcription method (Figure 4.1) for all the transcriptions in this study. The following circle talk focused on 22 people meeting for the first time. It
was unusual that a group of new kindergartners were able to listen and respond to each other so quickly. I had my first inkling that these children were more than ready to work together. They were willing to risk sharing their thoughts. I heard whispers of self-confidence in this first exchange. Their voices, their intentions and motivations, got louder and stronger as the year progressed.

August 31, 2001  2 P.M.  circle talk

((I showed the kids some photos about friends that I had cut from magazines. I was careful to select cross-cultural pictures as well as cross-gender portrayals. We are sitting on the floor in a circle that quickly took shape since we joined hands in a circle before sitting down.))

Sue:  Everybody looks so good today. I noticed that you were helping each other even though you don’t know each other very well yet. I found some pictures of kids that know each other so well they are friends. Does anybody know how you make friends? What do you do to make friends?
Ned: I got girlfriends, lots and lots of ‘em!
Carl: No you don’t.
Ned: Yes, yes I do ()
Carl: You like girls
((singsong, teasing))
Ned: So, so what?
Jaz: [Yeah, it’s ok to have boys and girl friends,
Jan: No, I like girls better, boys are nasty.]
Sue: Well, in these pictures the boys and girls are friends. How do you make friends?
Jan: Friends should be good to each other.
Sue: OK, anybody else have an idea?
Jo: They don’t wreck your stuff.
Allan: They have fun and play together.
Jeri: I was thinking about friends.
Day: You can work with friends, too.
Jeri: You can find out what they’re thinking and do what they want.
Ned: Yeah, ask me anything. I know everything and I can read, too!
Sue: Thank you children. You have some good ideas about friends. Now, I want you to find one friend in the circle and ask them their name. We’ll do it like this: Hi, my name is Mrs. Wightman. What’s yours? ((I shake Jan’s hand and she answers, “Jan.”))
Ok, now you, Jan.
((She turns to Ned sitting next to her and repeats the pattern. We go around the circle until everybody has said their name and shaken hands with someone else. Downcast eyes on Matt, Dai, and DJ. Clov doesn’t speak and neither does Imani.))
Sue: Good work kids. Now pick one friend and I’ll teach you a game two people can play inside or outside.

Our circle talks began with friends because I could easily see that nobody knew anyone else. The children were hesitant and silent. They only spoke to answer a question from me. My journal notes from this date remind me that even eye contact between children was limited.
Complimenting them for talking and thinking about friends was my way of gathering them together. As the year progressed, the norm of talking over problems and “finding out what they’re thinking” (Jeri) was solidified.

Added to this framework of listening and speaking about a particular topic were the “rules.” I introduced three rules within the first week of school. Through additional circle talks, dramatizations, creating a song, and applying the rules to various situations throughout the day, the children were able to characterize their actions under these headings:

- take care of yourself
- take care of others
- take care of the place
These rules became area-wide reminders about the community I hoped to establish with the children. They set the stage for the children in my homebase to look closer at how their community was developing.

For example, taking care of others was a direct link to the friendship idea that was surfacing in circle talks. Children explained what they meant by taking care of others in terms like Jan’s “Friends should be good to each other.” Other comments about “having fun with friends” and “working with friends” were acted out in the course of the day. Some of the first photographs also captured these connotations of friendship. Later, friendship, in all its forms and variations, became a key component of the children’s definitions of our community.
First Photographs: Relationship and Critique Emerge

Getting at intention and motive is not a simple task. The face-to-face interactions that were beginning to show up in circles were also happening throughout the classroom. Since I was most interested in relationships that were developing among children and teachers, and how they affected community-building, I wanted to be immersed in that context. The digital camera became another way of capturing incidents that I hoped would show others what I was seeing—tentative steps toward building a community.

Using my laptop to screen the photos with the children was especially relevant. For example, Day was reading about friends with me. After a quick lesson with the digital camera, I asked her to take a picture of some of her friends. I downloaded the photo to the laptop and called Day over to tell me about the picture.
September 4, 2001  Day’s community

Sue:  This is a great picture, honey.  You found lots of friends working together.  Why did you take this part of the room?
Day:  Well....ummmm....I saw Char and Matt working in the reading center.
Sue:  What about the kids in the background?  ((I point to them in the photo.)
Day:  Yea, they were working too and see ()she is looking at her work on the steps.
Sue:  Do you think the kids in your picture look happy?
Day:  Yes they do and I do too.  It’s fun to do centers with friends and stuff.
Sue:  Are you friends with all these kids?
Day:  Some, not all (2.0) yes, I think so and I can be, later.

I strived to include the child’s interpretation of actions that were unfolding.  Again, looking for time within the school day, I found rest time, silent-reading time, or small group literacy instruction time available for those interpretive conversations.  The photos helped us revisit and reflect on the activities that I theorized would lead to building a community.  In early September, child/teacher selected photographs and child/teacher interpretations were mounted on the central bulletin board.  Day’s visual reminder of some of the parts that could add up to community remained on view the entire year.
The effect of the photographs displayed was four-pronged.

First, children reviewed and reinterpreted the actions represented.

Second, teachers working in the learning area had an example of the kind of collaboration among children that we were committed to displaying. Teachers working with me could see how I used community-building photographs to guide the work I was doing with my homebase children. My interpretation of the actions portrayed helped me link community-building to the curriculum. Third, parents stated that the
text and photographs added to their understandings of what was valuable to me, the teacher. And fourth, as a researcher, this documentation of community in its infancy showed relationships already at work. Using photographs, I was able to interpret activities and link them to definitions the children and I were developing about community.

Documentation (through photographs and interpretations) is especially important in the process of tracing the building of a community. It produces traces that make learning visible, to child, teacher, and parent. Carlina Rinaldi (2001) reminds me that “documentation can modify learning” by allowing the child to see him or her self as others do. “It makes action tangible and, therefore capable of being interpreted.” (p. 84) Because we were building theory about the culture we were busy creating, we needed a way to make our context explicit. Photographs and interpretation helped us track the
attitudes individuals had about community and supplied meanings that only insiders could give.

In addition, the socially constructive power that the photos and interpretive text supplied encouraged the teacher/child to do more for and with each other. Rinaldi (2001) wrote, “Documentation is interpretation. It is a narrative form that offers those who document and those who read the documentation an opportunity for reflection and learning.” (p. 86) Using photographs improved our circle talks; it made our acts of friendship and the co-construction of community visible.

Douglas Harper (2000) uses visual images to inform his narratives. “Photography can produce data that can enlarge our understanding of sociological processes.” (p. 727) Harper (2000) continues with a reminder that “every visual narrative involves a decision concerning how much information to include.” (p. 724) In my
classroom, I was photographing powerful children in charge of their
learning, in action with others, and becoming more competent members
of our particular community. I was careful to consider what kinds of
photos would help me tell the story of co-constructing the community.
I encouraged children to add their own photos and interpretations.
From a simple heading that restated the rules we were applying,
children selected photos that they thought showed our three rules. I
included only one photograph that focuses on “taking care of others.”
The display itself contained eight photos with child/teacher
interpretation attached to each. It was our first look at
how we were “constructing” community.
Community is . . .

Taking Care of Yourself
Taking Care of Others, and
Taking Care of the Place.

Figure 4.3: Dai and Jan computer collaboration.

Dai: I am helping Jan learn the computer. She don’t know how to do it. But, I can help her. We are doing KIDPIX. She did good.

Jan: Dai helped me on the computer. She told me what to do and I did it. She is my bestest friend now!

Sue: The writing center is a good place for collaboration to take place. Children are empathetic at a very early age. Research indicates that building on that sense of “looking out for the other person” can be nurtured. In situations where children are allowed to initiate their own learning, connections can be made for and with the children. In this case, Dai and Jan were “taking care of others.”
My interpretation about the collaboration between Dai and Jan was an example of how I came to understand the links between building relationships and building community. The partnerships that I had hoped to see were starting to show up in the photographs and co-interpretations that described them.

Concurrently, curricular goals that set up a wide variety of experiences about taking care of others were forming. For example, I selected children's literature that fit the topic, incorporated collaborative elements in all the learning centers, pointed out actions that showed children helping others, emphasized the three rules through dramatization, sought out simple stories “read” by the kindergartners which focused on “others,” and suggested circle and writing topics based on “making friends,” to name a few. Building and maintaining relationships, identified by the children in early September, became a theme for the year.
Kid Reporters:  Reflections From The Mouths Of Babes

By early September, I needed another way of getting at the assumptions I had about community-building. I wanted to relate my speculation to definitions that other researchers had about community. I turned to the children for a different look at the images and texts we were constructing together and selected three key informants based on a simple rationale. They represented each parent-designated race in my class.

I renamed them “kid reporters” because the children had difficulty understanding what an “informant” was (Spradley, 1980). I was not comfortable with the term either; it sounded more like tattling than telling. It connoted intrusion rather than integration. Their job was to meet with me periodically and reflect on issues that were coming up through child and teacher interpretation of community-building.
My kid reporters were: Allan, a white male; Donald, an African-American male; and one bi-racial girl, Jaz. Allan and Jaz were talkative; a real plus when dialogue and information is desired. Donald was initially unsure of how to respond. As the year progressed, he changed from just looking and shaking his head to full-blown explanations about the community-building that he saw happening.

The questions that arose while I was interviewing the key reporters were used as talking points for the teacher focus group I established with my teammates. In other words, when a child’s comment struck a chord with me, I reworded it and pondered its meaning with my teacher teammates. The focus group sessions were videotaped and limited to once a month. I set a strict time limit of ten minutes due to the time constraints that all of us felt when school began.
As it turned out, ten minutes of focused conversation was more than enough for me to process. The wealth of information that came from transcribing the videos was immense. Categories that eventually sorted out into major themes within my study appeared here first through the analysis of kid reporter and focus group comments.

September 10, 2001  1:15 P.M.  kid reporters

((We have been reading about friends, how to make them, how to lose them. I reminded the kid reporters that we had some photos and ideas about how friends get together to make a community. The three children spent rest time looking at the bulletin board that we had constructed earlier. Allan was reading some of the text to Jaz and Donald. I called each child separately to a quiet table away from the resting children. Many kids were sleeping. Only two were looking at books quietly.))

Sue: Allen, I saw you looking at the pictures about friends. We’ve been talking and reading about friends and communities. What do you think community means?

Allan: Well, friends that can play, hang out, be together. You can ask friends their name and get to know them.

Sue: So, if you are playing with your friends and hanging out, how does that make a community?

Allan: You laugh and talk. You’re good to each other. You help them do some stuff.

Sue: What stuff do you do to help them?

Allan: Oh stuff like making sun catchers in the art center. That can work. (3.0) and (. ) maybe surprise them sometimes.

Sue: Thank you, Allen. Go get a drink, honey.

Sue: Donald, can I talk to you now?

((He comes over))

Allan was just telling me about friends and community. What does the word community mean to you?

Donald: Awww... maybe like playing football at recess?

Sue: You like to play football?

((He shakes head yes.))

Why do you like it?
Donald: I don’t know. It’s fun. You get to tackle people. Sometimes you get hurt.

Sue: Have you ever been hurt playing football at recess?

Donald: Yeah. I was hit hard but I got back up.

Sue: Who do you play with?

Donald: Allan plays nice. He doesn’t hit too much. Ned is a good guy too.

Sue: Thanks, Donald. Are you going to rest or read?

Donald: Rest, I think.

((He goes off to the couch in the corner)

Whereas, Allan and Donald take the friend part of community and elaborate on it slightly, Jaz, in the following excerpt, has very clear ideas about how a community is made.

Sue: Jaz, I’m ready to hear your ideas now. What do you think community is?

Jaz: Well, let’s see (1.0) Community is checking with others and finding out if they will be your friends. It’s like talking to enough people so that they know you are their friend.

Sue: What do you do to make friends?

Jaz: I play with them and talk to them a lot. Then I read with them or sit at their table. They know I want to like them then.

Sue: What if someone does not want to be your friend?

Jaz: (3.0) That’s a hard one. I guess I just keep talking to that one or another one. But it would take lots of time.

Taken together, Allan’s explanation and description of how to make friends, Donald’s link with what good guys do, and Jaz’s declaration that community takes time and a lot of talking, contained key elements that defined community for this small group of kindergartners. Consideration for the “other” friend was evident, as
well as the need for time and opportunity to build friendships. The children focused on relationships and the ways those relationships could be maintained. They speculated about friends and had specific ideas about how to make them.

Even at this early date, the kindergartners were moving into a process of interpreting what they did and why. It was the kind of documentation that could tell part of their story. It was the kind of talk that could help me see their intentions and motivations. It was groundwork that could sustain the group during crisis and calm.

As the circle talks, photographs, interpretations, and kid reporter accounts accumulated, the evolving definition of community became even more concrete through the actions of the children.

September 11, 2001 10 A.M. circle talk

((The World Trade Towers in NYC have been attacked. A parent, who has come to pick up their child, tells me to turn on the TV. I leave the room to do so and find it already on in the teacher's lounge. Hijacked planes have crashed into the towers. 5000 people could be dead. More parents are arriving to pick up their children. Everyone begins to wonder what is up.))

Sue: Kids, come into circle. I want to talk to you about what is happening.
((Some kids are already crying and asking for their mothers. They know something big is “going down.” They quickly and quietly leave their work and form a circle on the floor.))

Some moms and dads may be coming to pick you up. There has been a terrible crash in NYC. Two planes have hit the World Trade Towers. These are some of the biggest buildings in the world. The police and fire-fighters are on the scene helping people. Since the buildings are so big and important, some parents want their kids to be at home with them. If your mom or dad comes, fine, you can go. If not, I'll be here with you and we'll go back to our projects and games. Does anybody have any questions?

((Chorus of “I want to go home.” “I’m scared.” And, “Where’s my mom?” abound.))

I know it sounds scary but we can help each other feel better. What can we do?

Char: We can call our moms.
Ned: We can turn on the TV and see what’s going on.
Mica: Hey, here’s my mom, goodbye, see ya.
Rett: ‘Bye Mica. I don’t think my mom will come for me.
Sue: Remember, Rett, your sister is upstairs. She can come down here and work with us if it will make you feel safer.
Rett: OK, I’ll go get her.

((He leaves))

Sue: What else can we do to help each other?
Donald: We could see a movie or go out to play for awhile.
Sue: Good thinking, Donald, but the principal wants us to stay inside. Anybody else?

Clov: We can do our work until our moms come.
Sue: OK, let’s do that. If your mom comes and I’m busy with someone, please tell me you are going, AND, this is important, write your name on the chart so I know who has left. Everybody got it? Ok.

September 12, 2001 9:15 A.M. circle talk

((I suggest to the teachers that we meet the kids outside. It’s important that they see we are here and ok. We strategize about what to expect and all of us will have circle talks this morning. Before lunch count is complete, my homebase is in circle and ready to talk.))

Sue: I’m glad to see you all. It was scary last night watching TV and thinking about the people who live in New York. What do you think about it?
Ned: Bombs dropped on the towers and killed everyone.
Allan: Why did the buildings fall down. I saw it it on TV, they were falling fast.
Day: Yeah, people jumped out to be safe on the ground.
Char: More buildings are going to explode, my mom says.
Jo: Mean, mean guys did it.
Jaz: My dad said they don’t like America where we are..
Jan: ((crying quietly))
Sue: I know you are worried and afraid. So am I. What does your family say?
Carl: We have to kill the bad guys.
Donald: We have to shoot them.
Dai: Fire hurts. I got burned on the picnic.
Sue: Yes, it does hurt, very much. What can we do to help the kids in NY?
Mica: We can send them e-mails that say we are sorry.
Sue: What should we say?
Clov: Send letters, send letters to them.
Sue: Ok, what should we write?

Dear Kids in NYC,
We hope you are safe. We are sending picture and letters to you. We were scared when we saw your towers go down. We are building new towers for you and your family to look at. We are sending cookies, too. Be careful, watch out for the bad guys.
Love and hugs,
The Kids Area

Figure 4.4: Class letter to P. S. 39 in New York City.

Interpretation: Our Story of September 11, 2001

I included the letter the children and I created. It demonstrated the depth of feeling they were pouring out to others. As I reread and reflected on the circle talks that centered around September 11, I realized that, as a community, they had expressed worry and hope. They put aside their immediate concerns (who was going to “be friends” with whom, for example) and focused on a larger issue.
apparently outside of their current knowledge base. The circle talks
and the writing that came out of the tragedy showed me that an
empathetic community was emerging.

I recalled Zahn-Waxler’s work with the National Institute of
Mental Health in 1992. “Young children can interpret...psychological
states in others. They have the emotional capacity to affectively
experience the other’s state.” (p. 30) The dialogue and writing that
centered around September 11, showed me a group of kindergartners
who were operating in both spheres. That is, they were interpreting
and affectively experiencing another’s situation (Figure 4.5).
Alternative Interpretations: Circle As a Place of Safety

Figure 4.6, taken by Donald, indicates how Allan and Ned were coping with the event. They made many Lego models of the towers. They told me that they had to make one that would “stand up” to the bad guys. The kind of “reality” the photos supplied helped push the children and me into deeper reflections about what was most important when constructing community--the relationships among the members.
Ned: Me and Allan are building a big, big tower that can’t blow up.

Allan: If it does blow up the people will use parachutes to escape. We don’t want anymore people to die ’cause if they do then we will be sad again.

Ned: We put on lots of Legos at the bottom to make it strong. It will take a hit and keep staying up.

Allan: Both of us are building it and want it to be saved for circle.

Sue: Allan and Ned named this tower #142. They have been making different versions of it since 9/11. They are working out a problem here that appears to be a safety issue architects consider. Notice the words: big, strong, sad, and hit. Could they be working through their own fears? Maybe they are taking a positive step, restoring their own sense of safety.
Another interesting aspect about Ned and Allan’s conversation was that they wanted to keep their building and “save it for circle.” Why did they want to bring it to the community? (Fortunately, the building survived cleanup and the boys brought it to circle.) While neither child could explain the building’s importance, the fact that they talked about it in circle might suggest a view of circle, and by extension, a perception of our community. It was a safe place for discussing scary things.

Other children drew elaborate pictures to send to P.S. 39 (name changed) in New York City. I asked my daughter, who was living in the city, to contact a school that would welcome some kind words from friends in Ohio. She visited P.S. 39 and set up the connection with a kindergarten teacher. We sent our pictures and notes through The Nickelodeon Channel, which was the designated clearing house for mail coming in to New York City schools.

When I had the opportunity to visit New York in March, 2002, I saw our work upon the walls of the reopened school. The photographs I brought back provided closure of a sort. The children could get a feel
for how they affected others. Subsequent circle talks were devoted to wondering what else we could do. Mica suggested checking in by e-mail with “our New York friends.” Clov thought we should send some photos of us to “cheer them up.” Kat said they might need new books and Jeri wanted to call our “tower kids” on the phone. In short, the documentation (photographs and teacher/child interpretation) of this crucial event, helped us return to the business of making friends with a different understanding of how that could be done. The feeling of community, newly building in our classroom, was extended to included others outside of it.

_recursive Interpretation Meets Actions That Exclude_

Linking circle talk to activity, activity to reflection through photography and interpretation, and cycling kid reporter interviews throughout, the additional sources of data merged. I purposely scheduled informal interview sessions around issues of community-
building. The questions that were occurring to me were provoked by the kid reporters and the photographs I was taking. For example, in early October, I noted that Dav and Jo seemed to be excluded by others. My fieldnotes suggest that other children were rejecting them.

October 8, 2001 2:00 P.M. math

((Dav is following Jeri. He sits and looks at her while she keeps working. He reminds me of a love sick teenager! She is moving her body to block him out. She is smiling slightly (flirting?) Dav moves around her in an attempt to look at her fully. He is smiling widely. His eyes are focused on Jeri.)

Jeri: Stop following me around Dav. You are bugging me!

((Dav doesn’t respond orally. He just sits across the table from Jeri. He is talking so quietly I can’t hear what he is saying.))

October 16, 2001 9:30 A.M. journals

((Jo is making bzzzz sounds during journal time. Jaz is telling him to stop it. Jo has been making sounds most of the week. He looks for different people to sit by, but doesn’t talk to them, only makes noises. He really needs a friend.))

Jaz: Jo, I don’t like that. Leave me alone! Quit looking at me!

Based on these observations, I began to focus on making Dav and Jo feel a part of the group and I was getting nowhere fast. It was my feeling that “community” meant inclusion. The typical habit of excluding others was an issue whose discussion could advance our co-
construction of community in the classroom. Thinking about Dav’s experience, in particular, I went to the kid reporters to seek advice.

October 16, 2001  1:30 P.M.  kid reporters/exclusion

Sue: Have you ever been left out? How did you feel about it?

Allan: Once someone took my backpack on the bus. I was sad. I saw somebody take it. He grabbed it and ran and teased me. No matter what I said he wouldn’t give it back.

Sue: You said you were sad and that he was teasing you, how did you get your backpack back.

Allan: My sister yelled at him and then he dropped it. On the bus after school he said my sister was a bad writer and she cried.

Sue: What did you do?

Allan: I don’t like being in trouble so I didn’t say anything.

Sue: Do you want me to talk to the boy?

Allan: Teasing isn’t good. It makes you feel bad. I try to be as good as I can at school.

Sue: Donald, have you ever been left out of a game? How did you feel about it?

Donald: Not a game, I always get to play, but today when I got my writing log out Dav teased me. He said my writing looked dumb.

Sue: What did you do?

Donald: I moved away from him and said forget YOU. I was mad.

Sue: What else could you do?

Donald: I could play with somebody else or tell the teacher.

Sue: You just told me. Teasing or making fun of other people doesn’t sound too good does it?

Donald: Naw, but I don’t like Dav anymore. He shouldn’t tease me.

Sue: Jaz, have you ever felt left out?

Jaz: Yes, I had two friends over and they didn’t play with me. That wasn’t fair.

Sue: How did you feel about that?

Jaz: Well, (2.0) I waited to see if they would start playing with me, but they never did. I cried but not ‘til they went home and then my mom said Kat could come over next time. She’s nice all the time.
When I took time to reflect on this aspect of community with the kid reporters, I noted that Allan and Donald played a little more with the “excluded” Dav. They sympathized with him, offered their favorite toys to him, and tried to include him in their center work.

For his part, Dav remained fixated on Jeri and the other girls. The more he followed the girls, the more abrasive they became.

Finally, the issue resolved itself when Dav announced in circle, a few days later, that he was “through with mean girls.” It caused a little laugh to escape from Donald who looked at me knowingly, perhaps recalling our conversation about Dav and teasing.

At the same time, I was beginning to code my field notes based on explanations that Corsaro (1985) suggested. A full description of these codes, and my use of them, is included in Chapter 3 of this study.
October 16, 2001 field notes

ON
Dav and Jo seem to be outsiders. They usually sit in the back while I am reading a story. Jo frequently teases and goes out of his way to provoke others. Dav seems directed toward the girls. He is looking at Jeri and is following her around to the centers, today. She continues to work. He is just looking on at her.

MN
So, what’s wrong? Is it all sweetness and light around here? Why am I not seeing disconfirmation of community-building? Am I missing something important? Yes. What about the kids who are being excluded from certain groups of friends? What about the kids who are excluding themselves from participating fully in our circle talks? Who are they? What’s going on in their lives?

TN
Routines are running smoothly. Center rotations reflect an increasing awareness on the team’s part of how community can be formed. We decide that the more opportunities kids have to work together, the more it can be formed. The Calendar work, job responsibilities, knowing the plans for the day, the week, and the month, and the work we are doing with the children on applying our “rules to live by” is paying off. See Peterson’s life in a crowded place. So, why isn’t this helping Dav, Jo, and Matt?

Their comments about being excluded led me to fashion a question that I hoped would help teachers reveal their perspectives on exclusion. This formula of tying my field notes to interpretations from children/teachers remained the same throught the study. It helped me hear voices that I might have missed. It moved me toward seeing the other side of the community construction—isolation and disregard.
Teacher Focus Group: Discussing Exclusion

Within this evolving structure of talk, photo, interpret, and interview with the children, I then turned to the teacher focus group format as a way of clarifying what I thought I was seeing in the interactions just described.

October 31, 2001 focus group/exclusion (names are changed)

Sand, Elise, Jeff, and Sue
((I read the kid reporters comments about exclusion to the teachers.))

Sue: Are some kids left out? Are they excluded from the community?

Elise: Social competence is developmental. Maybe the kids you selected have a higher aptitude for it. It sounds like they have a handle on what it takes to get along in this area.

Jeff: Yes, some of the kids I have self-exclude, (mentions name), for example. His personality is such that he rubs kids the wrong way. They exclude him because they can’t trust him.

Sand: How do we draw in a kid who disrupts and stops other kids from learning? Compassion for the kids excluded is sometimes rooted in self-preservation.

Sue: You mean the kids who get close to him get hurt?

Sand: Yes. The unpredictable nature of his behavior keeps others at a distance.

Jeff: When a child is explosive, fear can cause other kids to stay away.

Sue: So does the fear factor get this child what he wants? Does it get him the attention he needs?

Jeff: Yes, he gets it from me almost everyday. So what I’m doing isn’t working.

Sue: Sometimes I work next to a kid for awhile to find out some wonderful part of his personality. I use it to bring him to the attention of the group in a positive way. Having a “claim to fame” for something good can sometimes make that child see himself in a different way. It can also show other kids that there is more to him than trouble.

Sand: But what about the kid who wants to be left alone, who wants to be excluded and removes himself from groups, circles, friendships?

Elise: I wonder if we should be doing more circles with the kids like Sue does. Maybe we can be on the lookout for behavior that is worth celebrating.
Cycle of Interpretation: Naming Recursive Practices for Teacher and Child

My model of a Mobius strip (Figure 4.7), named after mathematician A. F. Mobius, illustrates the process that provoked relationships and revealed differing perspectives about our community in November, 2001. Even though the model looks seamless, overlapping agendas, furious action and contemplative lulls were experienced. Nevertheless, the display does designate the way the children and I approached telling our story.

Selecting the Mobius strip as my model was deliberate on my part. I was searching for a display that would indicate the ongoing, fluid, and regenerating properties that photographs and interpretation could supply. Originally designed to produce a one-sided surface, the
Mobius strip has come to stand for continuous movement. It does so in my application.

Figure 4.7: The cycle of interpretation can begin anywhere in the process.

The interpretations of teacher and child located at the crossroads of the model, connected relationship and friendship as powerful motivators for sustaining reflection and fostering action in the community. As teacher and child uncovered and used the cycle, a deeper understanding of what it meant to be a member of a community emerged. Because the children were very motivated to make friends, photographs showing actions that helped that happen became prized.
The children were able to recall important actions using the photographs and that provoked interpretation in circle talks. The children became accustomed to using photographs and other artifacts to review action and speculate about another’s perspective. The photographs and the interpretation that went with them created an ongoing, inclusive way of getting at the intention of friends.

The broken lines circulating around inside and outside the strip, demonstrate that there are many possibilities for beginning the cycle. Leaving space for emerging reflection was key to understanding how the community became constructed. Reflection could materialize from many places throughout the process of interpretation.

The arrows that move through the Mobius strip in Figure 4.7, indicate the flow of talk and action that permeated our community. Photographs, for example, were open to various explanations. Kid reporters, and other members of the class, could make comments
about their own photographs or the photographs taken by others.

Those comments were then used by me to stimulate the teacher focus group. The teachers suggested curricular changes and actions that were responsive to kid reporter comments. As the activities rolled out and on, circle talks again became the place for reviewing and planning with children. Circle talks revealed the children’s intentions and motivations. The repetition of the cycle reinforced the concept that everyone’s idea could be voiced and heard. The pattern shown in Figure 4.7 represents the continuous action that is needed to create a community.

*Sustaining the Talk/Moving to Action*

Continuing this cycle that started with an observation, collected perspectives from kid reporters, and moved on to the teacher focus group, I hypothesized that another circle talk might help Dav and Jo understand how they could make friends. How to make friends and how
to lose them was a more accurate view of relationships from a child’s perspective at this time of the year. This dichotomy, suggested by key phrases uttered in a circle talk on November 20, 2001, was evident in Figure 4.8. It was posted and referred to by teacher and child. We called it “The Friends Chart.”

The Friends Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How To Make Friends</th>
<th>How To Lose Friends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>taking care of others</td>
<td>being mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helping</td>
<td>teasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being good</td>
<td>hitting others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>getting along</td>
<td>arguing over and over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>standing together</td>
<td>not sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>playing nicely</td>
<td>running away from</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.8: Friends chart developed during writing workshop.

The circle talk and the subsequent action that Dav took to use the information, convinced me that he was actively constructing one of the key elements of community-building. Relationship and friendship had come to the foreground. I could hear his intention clearly. It remained to be seen what he would do about it.
December 7, 2001 field notes 10:15 A.M.

ON
Dav spent 20 minutes in the art center, drawing someone that he had helped. I noticed he was talking to Jovan the whole time he was drawing. Could it be that he is seeing himself as capable of making friends? I'll ask Janet (instructional assistant's name changed) to take dictation. Maybe I can help him see that he is being a friend.

MN
Did it make a difference that he was asking Ned to read the friends chart to him? I put it right next to the art center.

Two days later, Dav turned in his homework assignment. Jovan was in it. When I talked to him during rest time, I used the words from the chart on how to make friends. I asked him why Jovan was in his
picture. He said, “Jovan is my new best friend.”

Figure 4.10: Dav’s homework.

*Shifting View of Classroom Practices: Child-initiated Activity Emerges*

With collaboration at an adult level, dialogue with children through circle talks, photo interpretation, kid reporters, and the hum of the classroom ever-present, the cycle of interpretation was not
only moving community-building ahead, it was threatening to pass me by! I began to doubt where the data was leading me. Would I be able to construct a theory base that described the fluid nature of child/teacher intention in building a community?

Adapting Spradley’s (1980) matrix of questions (Appendix C) helped me keep the data fresh and viable. As I moved to discover our definition of community, the themes of child-initiated and teacher-selected activities seemed to leap out. Coding my field notes for child-initiated and teacher-selected activities helped me see the trees and the forest as mid-year approached. Searching for answers, I was guided toward a subtle change in how I viewed community construction. I began documenting incidents that showed child initiative. I wanted to know if circle talks, photographing, and interpreting how friends were working together, and the curricular emphasis on community-building,
were making a difference in the way the children were creating and
negotiating our community.

The Middle of the Year

December 5, 2001 4:00 P.M.  personal journal

A teasing incident about who has more Art Stars has spread from our homebase to the entire area. Art Stars are rewards that the art teacher gives the group that cooperates for “the whole art period.” Even though I do not agree with the premise of rewarding behavior that is expected, my homebase children are excited to know that they will be the first to receive the popcorn party the art teacher had promised them. They tell me that they almost have ten stars and that means they win. I’m wondering what they lost.

December 6, 2001 field notes 12:45 P.M.

ON

Kids are going to their homebase circles after recess. Some are sticking out their tongues as they come to circle. Others are laughing and walking an exaggerated stroll that seems to indicate, “I’m bad!” That is, they’re cool. I switch on the tape recorder.

Jeri:  Hey, we got the most stars! Yeah, yeah, yeaaaah!!
Sue:  What does that mean, Jeri?
Jeri:  We get to do the popcorn party. ((She dances in place))
Jan:  Yeah, and nobody else gets any! Right, Jeri?
Jeri:  Yeah, we get it all and no losers get any.
Kat:  Did you see (mentions name). She was crying about the popcorn.
Jan:  Too bad for her (). That’s just too bad for her.
Jeri:  I like (mentions name). Let’s talk to her at lunch.
Kat:  Ok, maybe we can say she can have some of ours.
Jan:  Oh:::ok if you want to Jeri.
Jeri:  MRS.WIGHTMAN, can we have a circle?
Child-initiated Activity:  Conflict Resolution in Circle Talk

This conversation marked the first instance of a child-initiated circle based on conflict. Earlier, Tower #142, constructed by Ned and Allan, suggested the likelihood that other children might begin to use the circle to solve problems that were important to them. Jeri’s apparent frustration caused my action. My agenda, revealed in my journal, did not match the child’s. I moved out of the way and supported Jeri’s effort at influencing her peers.

December 6, 2001 2:30 P.M. circle talk

((Jeri has been trying to get kids to come to circle. Finally, she asks me to help.))

Sue: Kids, Jeri wants to talk about why (mentions name) was crying this morning. Anyone who wants to talk with Jeri about it, leave your work and come now.

((15 kids come and make a circle with Jeri. I do too and turn on the tape recorder))

Sue: Ok Jeri we want to talk about why (mentions name) was crying. What happened?
Jeri: Ok. Ok. Ok. Ha. Ha. She was crying because kids were teasing her and saying that she was a loser. She didn’t get no popcorn. She was crying.
Sue: Is this about the popcorn party and the Art Stars?
Kat: Yes, we have only one more to get and then the popcorn party starts.
Ned: Then some kids said toooo BAD to (mentions name)..
Jeri: Jan was with her and teasing and being mean.
Jaz: That’s not too good, Jan.
Jan: Uh uh (1.0) I wanted Jeri to talk to her.
Mica: (mentions name) kepted on crying outside though.
Donald: Teasing is mean and not good.
Sue: Does anybody have any ideas about what we could do to help (mentions name)?
Jo: We could give her some popcorn. That might work.
Sue: What else could we do?
Nash: Ummm(1.0) I got it! We could share it with them.
Allan: Yeah, we could give them some and us some.
Sue: How would we do that?
Ned: We could ask the art teacher for more popcorn.
DJ: YES and lots, lots, lots more.
Sue: Who will ask her?
Jeri: I’ll write her a letter and take it right now.
Sue: Ok, Jeri, get going.

((Jeri goes to the mailbox center and begins to write. Other kids keep talking.))

Char: Yea, she can pop a lot and put it in bags.
Dai: Then ()share it with all the kids.
Sue: Good idea, Dai. How can we do that?
Dai: ((shrugs shoulders, looks around circle at others.))
Rett: We should talk to Jeff and Sandra’s kids and ()
Sue: Ok, I’ll talk to them and we could all eat outside together.
Jeri: Very good ev(h)erybody. Now don’t forget to share.

Jeri’s desire to “have a circle” opened up the possibility for other children to call for a circle when they viewed it necessary. When we divided the popcorn, we took another step closer to creating a common unity. Taking care of others became actualized as we shared our popcorn reward with the children in Sand's and Jeff’s homebases.
Teacher-selected Activity: Components of the Environment

By December, my view of how child-initiated and teacher-selected photographs documented community-building was changing, too. As the children and I became more acquainted with the type of action-review that the photos provided, I once again sought a way to organize exactly how acting on intentions was an important part of our story. Realizing that this type of research demanded boundaries that were changeable, I searched for additional model. Following the twists and turns of child/teacher relationships offered insights. Trying to answer two questions from the matrix (described in chapter 3, complete form in Appendix C) helped me get closer to the heart of the matter:

- How is collaboration among child/teacher supported?
- What kind of relationship was I seeking with the children?

Seeking clarification, I looked at the environment and the co-constructed nature of it. My reflections and analysis during this time
period revealed the following important elements that added to the community-building experience for child and teacher.

Centers as Places of Collaboration and Dialogue

Centers, as they were constructed in my classroom, supported the child’s effort toward becoming more collaborative as well as more knowledgeable about the topic under study. Collaboration for us meant using the materials located in the centers, in conversation with and assistance from, other children and/or adults. Some of the activities in the centers had predictable outcomes. Other jobs were open-ended (center description/rationale in the daily schedule, Appendix A). Since small groups rotated through the centers located on the perimeter of the learning area, children had many opportunities to work with friends. Individual child choice within the centers was encouraged and routine by the third week of school.
The expectations (or rubric, if you will) for center work that I set with the children during a circle talk, were listed in our homebase and included: selecting a “job” or activity, finishing it, doing your best work and, asking a friend if help was needed. When “asking a friend” became part of the norm for children, I retuned to the question matrix and asked myself how centers were linked to the emerging relationships that I observed.

I saw how repeated collaborations while doing center choices worked like glue, binding particular children together to complete work and fastening them to a community that was expecting the work to be valued. In the whirl of activity that connotes our center work, I was able to see children working together for a common good. And, even though that “common good” might be finishing the job, the experiences the children had continued to multiply simply because the center rotations and jobs were in place and functioning well. Individual children
working in centers, presented with challenging activities, could
influence the way the community operated. Center work, based on
dialogue and the desire to produce best work, set the stage for yet
another element that fostered community-building as the year
progressed--portfolios.

_Portfolios: Signs of “Best Work”_

Toward the last third of the year, the children were more
concerned with “doing best work.” They had been selecting, finishing,
and asking for help since September. Now they tuned into adding
center items to their portfolios (see Glossary for description) that
represented standards they interpreted in many ways. Some children
focused on amassing work. Many others concentrated on putting in a
few good things. Some children started questioning each other about
portfolio items.
I decided to target that critique angle. I wanted a deeper understanding of how centers (and by extension, portfolios) could become another window opening onto the role of intention and motivation in building community. Interactions previously documented were coded a second time. By reexamining the multitude of photographs and interpretations showing center activity, and the actual paper work destined for portfolios, I hoped to eclipse what happened around the child and document a little of what could have happened within.

My homebase had been photographing center work since September. The majority of the children’s photographs taking during this study, revealed aspects of center work/collaboration that they considered important. Since centers were scheduled four days a week, my motive for seeking child-initiated activity also influenced the pictures the children took during this period. For example, I asked
them to think about how different friends used the centers.

I suggested that they look for kids who were working together or working alone on center jobs.

At first, children like Allan who took the photograph shown in Figure 4.11, focused on poses that showed products and completion. This slowly changed as more and more photos were examined for signs of community building.
Allan: I took the picture of these guys because they were done working. They did the letter/picture game in the reading center.
Rett: Yes, we did do it just the right way!
Mica: Yep, it looks all matched up, so we’re smiling.
Imani: I helped do it.
Day: Me too, do you want to see how we did it?
Allan: Uh uh, ((shakes head)) I’m going to take some more pictures. See ‘ya.

Sue: I wrote down the children’s conversation with Allan because I was interested in seeing and hearing how his initiative would pay off. His subjects were more than eager to share their thoughts with him. They seemed proud to be finished. Allan was anxious to be off with the camera. The novelty of it captures his attention. On the other hand, he spent 15 minutes searching through the centers for someone that fit my suggestion. That is, take photos of kids working together and sharing materials just like we talked about in circle.
If I slow down the amount of picture taking would I get responses that would clarify the idea floating around in our homebase that equates “being done” with “being good?” The kids look like they are hurrying from one center job to the next. Where is this speed coming from? How do my intentions for centers, take your time, do your best work, get translated into hurry up and finish?

Critique of Friends: Challenging Teacher View of Centers

Jeri’s photograph of Kat and Mica working in the art center (Figure 4.12) showed a perspective that was different from Allan’s in a significant way. When I asked Jeri to tell me why she took this picture, she said that the kids were sharing the paints and “being good.” I asked her if she got to see what they were doing. Jeri said that Kat and Mica were working together on a painting to share with the homebase. She thought they looked like they were concentrating.

Her interpretation indicated intention revealed through action.

Then, too, “being good” had its roots in the “How to Make Friends” list we had compiled and posted in November. Jeri told me she
remembered that description and could now apply it to the action that she photographed. She was critiquing friends.

Figure 4.12: Jeri’s photograph of Kat and Mica in the art center.

The next photograph, taken by me and interpreted by Donald, criticizes centers.
Sue: What was going on in this picture, Donald? What were you and Jeff talking about?
Donald: Well (2.0), I was in trouble.
Sue: What happened?
Donald: I tore up my center work and Jeff got mad.
Sue: Did you like the work?
Donald: No, it was too easy and too messy.
Sue: Easy how?
Donald: It’s the same thing over and over. It’s boring.
Sue: So you tore up the work because it was boring?
Donald: Yeah, and I couldn’t finish it on time either.

Donald’s interpretation of being in trouble was connected to his idea that he couldn’t finish the activity by the time centers were over.
I decided to use this photograph with the entire homebase, thinking that I might get closer to intention as well as critical review. First, I asked Donald if I could use the photograph.

January 7, 2002  11:50 A.M.

Sue: Donald, this picture shows you and Jeff talking about a problem in the math center. I know you two spent time talking. Could I show this picture in circle and could you tell the kids what the problem was?

Donald: Ok but I want to hold the picture and show it around.

Sue: Ok, let’s try it right after recess today. If you start feeling funny about talking, let me know. We don’t have to show the picture.

Donald: Nawww. I look good in it and Jeff’s head is really bald! Ha. Ha.

January 2, 2002   1:15 P.M.  Circle talk/center changes

ON
During lunch, I printed the photo and made 4 copies. I probably opened myself up for more copies of photos! I need stock in Epson ink!

Sue: Donald and Jeff were talking about center work in this photograph. Donald can tell you more about it.

Donald: Well I said that centers were boring and easy.

((The circle is quiet.))

And I didn’t get my work done because the time goes and goes.

Sue: So, kids, Donald and I were hoping that you might have some good ideas about how to change the centers.

Carl: Move the blocks to the reading center. That could be more funner.

Nash: If housekeeping was by the back door we would have a door to come in and go out of.

Clov: Put some games in the math center. Then Donald could do them for fun.

Donald: Put some computers in the math center, too.

Sue: Hold on you guys. I’m taking notes! Ha. Ha.

Mica: We could do math jobs on the green couch.

Char: Yea, let’s move EVERYTHING around!!!
ON
The teachers met today and discussed the possibility of moving some center equipment and jobs around. Jeff said he wanted to make the math center more exciting. Sand said her kids had been talking about changing the centers, too. I mentioned the circle talk we had had. We set next Wednesday for moving day.

TN
I see a pattern setting in--I go back to circles to clarify and problem-solve. I am expecting the kids to make sense of the environment. I want them to have a say in how it works. Malaguzzi asks, “What does our space say?” I ask what does my space say about relationships and interactions? Layers of interpretation of teacher/child are building up, adding on, and becoming an integral part of the community we are creating. What other kinds of interactions are going on?

As I reflected on how our circle talk examined the way teachers and children viewed centers, it became clearer to me that this was co-construction in action and at its finest. The conflict that Donald and Jim had is a natural and important part of community-building. The discussion about the organization of the space called centers, provoked different responses and those responses were valuable and had to be heard by the entire community before action was taken.

Because the incident between Donald and Jim encouraged me to speculate about teacher and child relationships, I saw a direct test of our community. Through center work, dialogue, and teacher/child interpretation, interdependence was actualized and the community was strengthened.
What actually goes on in the school is a basic test for all of us. The continuous activity is the most important thing for us and represents that which can contribute the most to keeping fresh (a term dear to Dewey) our interest and the continuous mobility of our thought and action. I believe that our schools show the attempt that has been made to integrate the educational project with the plan for the organization of work, so as to allow for maximum movement, interdependence, and interaction. (Malaguzzi, interview, June, 1990.)

The End of the Year

Circle talks, photographs, teacher/child cycles of interpretation, and center work were becoming documents of, and documents for, the process of building community. The tools the children and I were using were becoming norms. Peterson (1992) maintains that trying to determine whether what is is as it “should be” generally refers to a norm. I started the year by asking and showing the children how community was being formed. By mid-year we were broadening our definition of community. We talked about including others. We knew how it felt to be excluded. We experienced collaborative work in
centers. We added the “should be”, the critique element, as project work commenced in February.

I moved toward deepening their understanding of particular subjects. I saw a way to capitalize on their power to think critically about topics under study. Documentation about specific activities that helped the community come together and the action they produced, were showing me the potential and capacity the children had for this kind of effort. As we moved toward the end of the year, projects began to give me a fuller picture of how this group of kindergartners were making sense of the world we were creating.

In a world that valued talk, collaboration, and reflection, it seemed natural for me to move my teaching and research agenda toward evaluation and consider how child critique could enhance the academic side of life.
If we are interested in exploring the genesis and development of meanings that children construct in their encounter with reality, if we want to know more about the procedures of thought and action used by individual children in their learning processes, then we must document not only that which took place around the child, but above all that which we think has taken place within the child. (Spaggiari, 1997.)

**Projects: Individual Work Co-constructed**

A project can develop a deeper level of collaboration among children and teachers interested in building a community. It has the potential to establish shared knowledge and a greater sense of unity as it flows out of curriculum work or center explorations. Projects can document what we think “has taken place within the child.” (Spaggiari, 1997.) Projects can challenge children to “do something large and complicated” according to Edwards and Forman (p. 309, 1996). Projects are “real life study of things that people care about and want to know more about” (Rinaldi, 1994). Projects are also “ideas embedded in a topic that give it meaning and importance such as shelter, health, or migration” (Katz, 1996).
In my class a project could “be” about anything. At times, it fit
in with topics already under study. Then, too, some projects were
interests picked up from conversations, literature connections,
television shows, factual videos, or individual child journals. Whatever
the origin or definition, I theorized that tracking the interactions during
the course of the project could illuminate the emotional and academic
supports that were available to the child. It also left room for me to
grapple with the kind of relationships I wanted to have with the
children. The questions were compounding and framing the next phase
of community-building:

• Could I help them become even more responsible for their own
  learning?
• Could I bring critical review into our community?
• How would I make that kind of learning visible?
• Would the children see critique of their projects in a positive
  light? They expected critique from me, but were they capable of
  accepting it from each other?
Kid Grid: Tracking a Project’s Progress

Several years ago, I was following a child’s progress as he developed a project. At that time I was tracking his decision-making process on the way toward completing an independent project. I designed a simple grid that did show his ideas: beginning with a special book about bikes and moving on to include the kind of bikes he wanted. My first attempt at labeling the project process was at odds with what was basically developmental in nature. The child would move through “the steps” I had established rapidly without pausing for the reflection that I had hoped would come. Putting a fluid process into a set form was a contradiction, I thought. However, that experience set the stage for this year’s work.

My current study needed an instrument that would, hopefully, focus the child’s attention on the relationships/friendships that helped produce the project. For purposes of this study, I reasoned that
mapping the relationships that helped the process along could give me
useful information about how the project itself contributed to
community-building.

From circle talks, center work, and my teacher journal, I began to
envision a model that might document the connection between
conversation and action as the project process evolved. I also wanted
children to “see” how their ideas affected others in our community.

Adapting Caine, Caine, and Crowell’s (1994) matrix on the quality of
curriculum, I used the kid grid in three different ways:

1. to solidify the steps toward project presentation
2. to consider the influence of friendship on the project process
3. to assess the degree of critique that might emerge

I hoped that I would be able to think about the quality of our
community-building activities while considering the curricular topics
under study. I was open to see what the children would make of this
new reflection tool. Following the cycle of interpretation that had evolved over the year, I used Jaz’s stuffed animal project as a prototype and introduced the grid during a circle talk.

*Jaz’s Project: Making Dialogue and Co-construction Visible*

February 10, 2002  2:30 P.M.  circle talk/kid grid

MN
We sit in a circle to talk about projects. Jaz’s project is nearing completion and she will be the first child to present her findings. I want to keep track of who she talks to and works with as she finishes it. I made up a simple grid that she will use to write the names of the friends who help her work on the project.

TN
The project is an example of a kind of child-initiated activity that seems to be circulating around the area—a domain that turned up in my coding this week. It could also be linked to the academic benefits that teachers see as community is constructed. It will be interesting to note if any other children start projects. Scaffolding on Jaz’s attempt introduces other theories worth thinking about: ZPD and academics could be connected through project development.

Sue: Some of you have been asking me to talk about projects. You’ve been wondering what they are and how to do them, right? Well Jaz is almost finished with her project about stuffed animals. Does anybody want to ask her questions about how she’s doing with it?

Day: I want to do a project too.
Char: Can I do a project on movies?

Sue: I am glad to see you are already thinking of doing your own project. It means you are thinking ahead. Right now, I want to think about Jaz’ work.

Ned: Well, she brought in lots of stuffed animals. I got to play with some.
Jo: And she also ( ) an elephant that was cute.
Jaz: My mom helped me pick out the ones to draw. ((She holds up a zebra.))
Sue: Your mom helped you. Did anybody at school help you?
Jaz: You did. You gave me the paper and stuff.
Me: Did any of your friends help you do the project?
Jaz: Kat held some of the animals while I drew them on the poster and Dai helped me color in the designs.
Sue: So, other friends helped Jaz with her project. She did not do it alone.
I thought of a way we can keep track of who helps whom around here. Do you remember that we said “taking care of others” meant helping them? ((many heads nod yes)) Well, I made this grid from graph paper. ((I hold up the model)) Watch. See how I write the names in the boxes? That means those kids helped Jaz. Here, Jaz, you take it now (the grid) and write in names of kids who helped you. As you finish your project, and get ready to present it, we’ll know how you got your idea. AND, maybe we will know who helped you get it, too.

During this circle I guided the children toward understanding that the grid could show “who you talked to,” “who your friends were,” and, “who helped you with your project.” I was thinking about Rebecca New’s comment in The Hundred Languages of Children (1996). She said that American teachers were tuned into “individual rather than group social competencies” (p. 219). I had been favoring and fostering ways that included rather than excluded other voices in my study. I was ready to make dialogue and co-construction visible to the children.

Academic prowess could be displayed in the process of completing a project and it could also strengthen community construction practices. Children could see how reading, writing, and
drawing would make the project valuable to others. They could have a
cement reminder of the importance of literacy and how it helps
people communicate. And, perhaps, they would be encouraged to try a
project with a little help from their friends. Levels of interaction
between children and among teachers would again be made visible. The
completed kid grid had the potential to show the child’s perception of
his or her own learning. It would demonstrate to peers and interested
others the power that child documentation could have in a larger
context.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of Interaction</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critique</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.14: Jaz’s completed kid grid shows the levels of interaction within a project which support community-building.
Levels of Interaction Support an Inclusive Community

I used the project grid as a visual clue, a way of assessing the scope of a child’s knowledge on a particular topic as well as an indication of the levels of interaction possible during the process. The kid grid made me see how integrating the community elements of project source, action, talk, and critique fit with the definitions the children had espoused earlier in the year. The completed kid grid illucidated the impact projects had on the community.

The phrases that were posted in The Friend’s Chart (Figure 4.8) represented key words that filtered through the conversations, circle talks, and center collaborations all year. Those words, posted and ready, were used to set the parameters of the kid grid. We borrowed the language of friendship denoted on the chart and applied it to the ways in which we could talk about projects. “Helping others” on The Friend’s Chart was a behavior that was analogous to “Action” and
“Talk” on the grid, for instance. On the other hand, “being mean” on the chart was the antithesis of “smiles” and “thumbs up” in the “Critique” section of the grid. The grid was designed to do several more things as well.

1. I could show the children the steps Jaz took as she completed her project. The idea could literally come from anywhere and then with peer, teacher, and family help, be organized and refined.

2. The quality of the project could be examined. The grid could help me and the children track how many people were involved in its production; a solid lesson on interdependency and community action.

3. Student intention and motivation could be taken into account. I had a concrete way of demonstrating to the children how much they knew about their project topic at the end of it. I also speculated that while child critique might center on color, layout and topic, mine could underscore the ways in which we were learning from each other.
When I adapted the chart to fit my kindergartners, they wrote in the names of friends, drew small sketches or photographed the “Action” or “Talk,” while I recorded the evaluative comments that came from the presentation step called “Critique.”

Using the grid to make child/teacher interactions visible also provided clues for what might be going on inside the child. Peterson (1992, p. 93) wrote, “Teaching that centers on critique believes that all human activities have an expressive character, and a function of education is to aid students in developing their expression.” The kid grid helped Jaz and her classmates express their reasons for beginning a project in the first place.

From a researcher’s point of view, the kid grid also became the first link to Goleman’s EQ statement in Chapter Two--Jaz was definitely “motivating” herself. “People who have this skill tend to be more highly-productive and effective in whatever they undertake.”
(1995, p. 43). She was marshaling her emotions in the service of a goal. She was paying attention to the mastery of her topic and creating a story that was uniquely hers. It also supported Caine and Caine’s (1994) notion of experiences that have worth and value.

Immersion in complex experiences means that the teaching experience is “rich”, multilayered and complex enough so that there are many opportunities for students and teachers to use the language of critique, resolve opposing views and opinions, and engage in critical thinking and reflection. (Caine & Caine, 1994.)

*Image of the Child: Academic and Interpersonal Strength Linked*

Comparing and contrasting the information provided by these grids of interaction also suggested various images of the child that were and are before me. My goal was to provide a description that was multilayered and culturally based. I looked through my data about projects again in an attempt to give a child-eyed view of how community is made. Graue comments, “We must consider how a particular context constitutes a specific set of needs and
expectations as well as how it provides us with ways that we can try to both help children’s voices be heard by the greater community and help children learn about themselves” (1998, p. 83). Jaz’s voice in the following transcript is clear and powerful. She is learning about herself.

February 3, 2002  12:30 P.M. Jaz’s project critique

((Jaz and I are talking about her project presentation. I have the grid she and I completed between us and refer to her drawings and sentences about the experience. I turn the recorder on.))

Sue: Yesterday was great! You did a good job on talking about your stuffed animals to everybody. You can take your mural home today, but I wanted to ask you a few more questions about the work.

((Her face is inches from mine. A smile expands to show missing teeth.))

What do these sentences say?

Jaz: ((reading)) My zebra is my most favorite animal. I like to keep him on my pillow and throw him around in the air.

Sue: You are really writing descriptive sentences, Jaz. I can just picture you doing that in your room.

Jaz: Yeah, mom thinks its funny too and she wants to see the work I did about it.

Sue: Why did you write this part? You drew good pictures too.

Jaz: Well, I was thinking about making it sound fun and I had so many animals I wrote down this so I wouldn’t forget it.

Sue: When you were sharing with our homebase, were you scared?

Jaz: Nope (2.0) well (1.0) maybe a little, then I just read this and it was ok.

Sue: How did you learn to write?

Jaz: I think about the letters and the sounds and then I try to get them together. I asked Ned and Jeri to help me. But I didn’t need too much help. I can write lots and lots now by myself.

Sue: Who else helped you with your project?

Jaz: Dai and Kat did and we did the colors and tracing together. They can do it real good so I asked them and they said ok.

Sue: You were reading some books about animals, too. Did the books help?
Jaz: Some bit. I could see the way real zebras moved and stuff.
Sue: This project is ready for your portfolio. I am so proud of you.

((Jaz dances around the table, collecting the project. I take a photo for her portfolio; she goes out to recess.))

Figure 4.15: Jaz’s completed stuffed animal project.
Projects combine reading, writing, art, and oral expression. They were indicators of the many ways children were interpreting direct instruction. They were straightforward applications of the skills I taught. I set up the expectation in early February that projects were important and, through explanation and modeling, counted on the children to construct their view and share their intentions with the community. In Jaz’s case, I was able to help her identify how she had
produced the project and link it to relationships with other children
whom she valued. A few seconds of conversation revealed her growing
awareness of herself as a writer. It also uncovered her reasons for
enlisting the help of a few friends.

For me the course of Jaz’s project provided tangible evidence of
another kind. The interpersonal strengths, described by MI theory
(Gardner, 1994) and Armstrong’s (1999) educational adaptation of it,
were operating “to a high degree” in Jaz. I could see how projects,
centers, photographic interpretation, and circle talks supported her
(and her classmates’) growing ability to grow emotionally and
academically.

Working from circle talks, photos, focus group discussions,
interaction grids, and the cycle of interpretation that surrounded the
processing of data, a more complicated image of the child emerged.
This image was characterized by self-initiated activity that included
academic progress as well as relational strength. For example, Jaz began kindergarten not reading. She only wrote her name. By the end of the year her reading level was above Grade 1. Her writing had moved into complex description and detail. (Test scores and writing samples appear in Appendix G.) Building relationships and making friends described the actions she took on the way toward producing a project.

Other children showed signs of combining academics and relationship as well. Whether they were selecting a center job, producing a project, or bringing a topic to circle discussion, they were able to make their intentions known to friends. They sought support from peers and adults. They added to the landscape of community by building on the interdependency flowing through the environment. Just as the group project that evolved around September 11th went
forward to incorporate individual ideas the children had, now individual projects circled back to use the group’s perceptions about individual work. For example, when Jaz completed her project, Ned was ready with his on “Football.” His project layout showed that he learned from Jaz’s presentation. He was careful to label every drawing and arrange it so that his friends “could figure out what went with what.” During the presentation phase, Ned produced a football uniform, put it on, and proceeded to identify all the safety features. When we were completing his Kid Grid he asked me to note in the critique section, “I know all the answers because I am a real football player and I read two books” (field notes, February, 25, 2002). It was his way of telling me, and his friends, that reading could make a project more complete.
Image of the teacher: Changing Views About Practice Through Documentation

In this environment co-constructed and responsive to individual children and the whole group, I considered my own identity as well. My roles were many and shifting as the year progressed. Teacher/researcher/teammate labels seem easy to apply and yet, the work I was engaged in took years of teaching experience to coalesce. Using documentation, the cycle of interpretation, and kid grids that had characterized the data collection phase, I was surprised to see that those tools were also telling my story—a story about the kind of relationship I was seeking with my children and my colleagues.

The complex interaction with multiple points of view, the socially constructive power documented in the photographs, and the strong voices of the children were leading me toward a personal definition of community—a community in which conflict and compromise were as
natural as breathing—a community that united around the common cause of tolerating differing perspectives. The cycle of interpretation that started with the children continued as I worked with my teammates. I began to see how visual representations of social relationships were changing the way we worked together.

Figure 4.17: Teachers using photographs for planning/reflection.

March 9, 2002  focus group video/photos as provocations

ON
Clockwise, Elise, Sue, Jeff, and Sand, sitting in my area.
Looking at community-building photos as a source of provocations.
Considering larger role of taking care of others as documented in photo.
Sue: Here are some photos that I took. I'm hoping we could look at them for a few minutes. What do you think they show?

Sand: This one looks like the writing process. It reminds me that the kids are trying to make sense to others. They're trying to consider their reading peers.

Jeff: I see (mentions two names) putting aside their personality disorders and focusing on negotiating meaning through writing. I worked with my homebase and developed a rubric for writing. I think it keeps kids on task and focused. I've seen a positive shift in their writing because of it.

Sue: This photo, showing part of Ned's project developing indicates the deeper work I want from individual students. He was practicing for his presentation when Donald happened by. I overheard Donald ask, “But what's the name of those sharp-tooths?” Ned later said that he should have known the real name of the dinosaur. “I didn’t read enough.” I think this is important. It shows some of the kids are moving into individual critique.

Elise: What’s that quote? We learn best when we teach what we learn?

Sue: Yes, and Buddha said, our work is to discover our work and then give our heart to it. How do these photos show us what in the kids' hearts?

Sand: There appears to be more interplay among the homebases. Kids see others doing projects and want to do some, too. We might be at the point in the year where we are moving from a small community to a larger one.

Sue: Yes, (mailbox center). Look at this photo, it has a way of widening the scope of the community.

Jeff: Yeah, (mentions name) mail the other day was interesting (2.0) an interesting way of thinking how taking care of others fits in with the larger community. It said, if you stop hitting me, I'll write to you again. Ha. Ha. Ha.

Sand: What about the different roles people play in the community? Look at these boys. They are joking and teasing. That kind of behavior can disrupt learning. It's a negative kind of community they's building and not necessarily one that I want.

Sue: How are you trying to turn that around?

Elise: Maybe I can help you and sit by them during circles.

Sand: Well, I'm not having as many circles as Sue. It seems like I can barely fit in reading, writing, and math on most days. I really want to talk more about it. How about our next focus group? Ok?

Sue: Yeah and I'll bring some more photos. I'm trying to help kids look for actions that show community-building in a positive way. Maybe some of them might be interested in photos of trouble in paradise! Ha. Ha.
MN
Next focus questions:
What about negative behavior?
How do we see each other? Clarify roles of teacher.
Bring more munchies to next meeting!!

TN
See 100 languages reference regards role of teacher. Speculate on how different teachers see the community in different ways. Reggio teachers seem so united in their view of the child and their view of the work they do with the child. We sound much more individualistic in our approaches. Trying to synchronize various expectations and take advantage of moments of light (child and adult) that occur every day can bring conflict but that, too, can enrich the community.
Graue: childhood is a continual construction. It must be viewed from many angles to be understood and appreciated. Relationships are in continual construction, too.

Following the conversation about community, I wanted to probe the role I had in forming the relationships that supported community-building more deeply. Sand, Elise, and Jeff were willing to speculate with me about specific child/teacher interpretations of community throughout the year. With that in mind, I created a brief survey based on a focus group video about our relationships as teammates.
Specifically, I asked them to comment on my role on the team.
April 17, 2002  survey comments

Sand:  Sometime I wish I could just sit back and watch you.  I know regular circles are an important part of teaching for you. Involving the children in decision-making about the space, solving problems, and some affecting of curricular directions seem to flow out of your practice.  I'm working on how to get more circles into the crowded day.

Elise:  I see your role on the team as the person who always questions what we are doing. “Is it right for kids?” or “Is this right for parents?” You seem to look at the whole child as a member of a family and of our learning community.  I would guess that you think children's friendships and relationships are as important as reading scores??!! I see you working on building relationships with students and helping them build relationships with each other.  Every day I hear you saying, “Did you talk to him about that?” You allow your students time to work on their relationships.

Jeff:  You and I have very strong opinions about teaching. I think that your role is to point out some of the relationships between the children that the team may not have seen. I truly appreciate your efforts. I do believe that the social aspect of teaching is overrated, though. My job is to teach and the kids can do the socializing on their own time. I know this is in conflict with the way you view the dynamics of our learning area. And yet, you have convinced me how much I do to maintain relationships in the community. You have a way of looking at benchmarks, standards, etc. that always puts the child first. You make me think about my practice in new, rewarding, and sometimes, uncomfortable ways.

Alternative Views of My Practice:  From Matrix to Teacher Journal

As I reviewed my teammates’ comments, I reconsidered a list of attributes about the teacher’s role in building community that were proliferating in my personal journal. I returned to the matrix of questions (Appendix C) to cross-match the information from the matrix to memos in my journal.
I wanted to use the language of the matrix, which flowed from teacher focus group discussions and compare it to my perspectives in the teacher journal. Needless to say, my teammates’ survey comments were ringing in my ears. Seeking some insights into the trail of relationships I travel with children and adults, the table that I produced suggested a strong connection between child/teacher relationships and the teacher role I set for myself. That component became more visible as the year progressed.
The similarities that emerged by comparing my teacher journal notes about my role in community-building and the language of the matrix, from teacher discussions about child/teacher relationships were especially interesting.

The first column, identified as “Matrix,” highlighted the language I used to describe what, where, how, when, and why I saw child/teacher relationships affecting our community—information gathered directly from the question matrix. The second column, “Teacher Journal,” considered my role as teacher and describes some of the actions I recorded while in the process of co-constructing the community. Using the language of the classroom, recorded in the matrix of questions, and comparing it to the teacher/researcher language that was evident in my teacher journal, helped me see that theory and practice were alive in the community. For example, the term “co-constructing” listed under “Teacher Journal” was not usually heard in teacher focus
group discussions, nor was it used by the children. That word was directly connected to the theoretical position I was taking as a teacher/researcher investigating how communities are formed. Yet, the words “both learning” that was used in teacher focus group implied the same thing.

Since I consider education to be teaching and learning for both child and teacher, I could see more clearly how the curriculum was mutually-constructed after organizing the table. I could revisit tangible phrases, which teacher and children were using to identify community, when I looked at the “Matrix” side of the table. I could look for the places where co-construction happened, in centers/projects for example, and see how those places symbolized my efforts at making the curriculum and the social nature of it easily accessible for the child, through “maintaining and suggesting” alternative choices in centers and for projects, in the “Teacher Journal” section.
The “how” section of the table, shows that “circle talk” is connected to my behavior of listening to the children. Because I value collaboration, I am willing to listen for possibilities to emerge within our circle discussions. “Teaching through the environment” in the “Teacher Journal” column indicates a theoretical position explained within the Reggio Emilia framework. Making the “physical changes” with the children supports my notion that environment does teach. The language is complementary. The theory and the practice blend.

A memo, dated January 2, 2002, marked the circle talk (and the transcription of it) that opened up changing the math center and, according to the children, made it “funner.” The path from teacher journal memos, to transcript, to question matrix, is just one example of the recursive nature of my thinking during this study. The similarities between matrix descriptors and teacher journal notes, listed in Figure 4.18, helped me reconstruct the role I played in the co-
construction of our community. Eventually, the “why” was examined and my habit of provoking critique came into focus.

*Provoking Critique Among Teachers and Children*

“Provoking critique” with colleagues and among children is an essential descriptor of my practice. During the course of this study, I learned how the cycle of interpretation, which was highly individualized and content specific, also pushed critical review into public arenas. Hallways, bulletin boards, slide shows, and photo displays of the real work children and teachers were doing brought our work to a larger audience. Showing how relationships allowed teachers and children to forge new ideas made the landscape of school life more readable, more visible, and more acknowledged. The documentation that accompanied such a work in progress, suggested that other interested parties could build communities that were adaptable to their contexts.
While relationships (or friendships) helped teacher and children navigate the intricate patterns of behavior that emerged during community-building work, the arrows circulating around relationships in Figure 4.7, indicated that the cycle of interpretation was ongoing. In Figure 4.18, the double-headed arrows suggest a “back and forth” motion as I moved within my dual role of teacher/researcher. The double-headed arrows indicate that the language used in the matrix was closely aligned to the language in teacher journals. My role as theorizer and practioner are intertwined in figure 4.18.

Further analysis combined method development and conceptualization (Figure 4.7) with reflection (Figure 4.18). For example, alternative views of the teacher/researcher stance emerged from my journals, memos, and teacher focus group discussions. I was a teacher/researcher highly invested in making that role operate in tandem throughout the community construction process.
Observations, full participation in the community, conscientious field notes, and consistent interpretation of the activities, as they happened, led to the following assertions:

1. Children learned by interacting with their environment and actively transforming their relationships with adults and other children. They participated in constructing their identity and that identity was closely tied with how the teacher incorporated their ideas into the environment.

2. Children sought positive interactions with adults and other children. They sought them everywhere, but it was most visible (in my study) in center work/project work that was interrelated and open-ended in nature.

3. Teachers who cultivated the habit of actively listening to children, and at times, recorded those talks could influence the listening and responding behaviors of the child. Through sharing the information gleaned from the cycle of interpretation, they could also influence the responding behaviors of fellow teachers.

4. Teachers who expected children to have opinions and share them set up the expectation that some kind of action would be taken, either by the teacher or the child.
5. Teachers who recognized the power of constructive conflict and supported it, modeled community-building that was inclusive.

With these insights in mind, I turned to a consideration of inclusion from the children’s perspective. It came into view from a circle talk about playground problems. It shows that dialogue can make a difference when an inclusive community is desired.

**Inclusive Community: Dialogue Makes the Difference**

May 6, 2002  1:00 P.M.  circle talk/playground problems

(((Kids are coming in from recess, yelling about who is mean and who is not being good out there. Many children are crying, whining, pouting, dragging their feet, pushing, etc. They come into our homebase space and sit in a circle. Everyone wants to talk first.)))

Sue:  Ok, ok, everybody calm down.  Sit over here Dav.  Matt sit on the other side here.  (Space next to me.)  I can tell by your voices and faces that many of you are mad.  I'm going to take notes while we talk.  Maybe we can figure out what's going on . . .  (I turn on the tape recorder)

Allan:  I am mad at Nash.  He keeps coming in and out of the game messing it UP!
Carl:  Yea, Nash is being mean out there.
Imani:  ()comes and hit me on the arm, right here.
DJ:  [He comes and pulls my hair.
Jeri:  He wasn't being good.  He's a no good friend.]
Jaz:  Yes, and he did some other stuff, too (1.0)like spitting, running through the ropes.  You made me mad, Nash.

((Nash is starting to cry softly.  He covers his face.  Shoulders shake.)))

Sue:  It sounds like some kids got hurt.  And others are just plain angry at Nash.  What can we do about it?  ((I hand Nash some tissues.))
Rett:  He's got to miss recess for ten days.
Jo:  I'm not going to play with him, never, never.
Kat:  Well, maybe he could say sorry or something like that.
Jan:  Sorry isn't meaning anything.  He hits me all the time.
Donald: Send him to PEAK. ((a room set aside by the principal as a time out area))
Sue: I am not going to send Nash to PEAK, but I think maybe he needs a chance to talk.
((Eyes turn to Nash. Some kids have slight smiles. Nash is trying to blow his nose.))
Nash: People don’t want to be my friend. They tell me go away. They say I’m not playing right.
Allan: But you’re not playing right.
Ned: Yeah, we were getting bugged and bugged out there.
Sue: Nash, what do you think about all of this?
Nash: I want to play with them. They won’t let me so then it’s too bad, then.
Jeri: It’s too bad for you, too. You are just so mean.
Nash: You pushed me, Jeri. You said I didn’t do the game right.
Sue: So many kids are upset, Nash. Can anybody think of a way to help?
Jo: Well you could say, “Can I play with you?” They might say yes.
Kat: I keep trying when people say go away. You could do that maybe.
Nash: I don’t want to be by myself. Why don’t you guys like me?

((Nash says this looking at Ned and Allan.))
Allan: We like you, but not so mean is all.
Ned: Can’t you just talk and not push?
Sue: Nash, do you think you could try that?
Nash: Ok, but I need another chance.
Sue: Who is ready to give him another chance?

((Almost all give a thumb’s up sign or raise their hands.))

TN
I am seeing a surge in accepting responsibility for actions. The EQ described by Goleman is coming out strongly. That is, children are more willing now to delay gratification. They are persevering in the face of anger and frustration. The dialogues during circles are more directed to each other with me acting as a facilitator of the talk rather than arbitrator.

MN
It occurs to me that I can use a photo of Nash thinking it over that I took this morning. It reminds me that he has had a rough day from the get-go. I could capitalize on the circle talk about his behavior and use the photo to reinforce what the kids told him. Photo as self-critique of hurtful actions? Talk to Nash. tomorrow BEFORE he goes outside.

221
Figure 4.19: Nash thinking it over.

May 8, 2002 12:25 p.m.
((Kids outside for recess. I asked Nash to meet me at the chart. He brought chair over after lunch and waited.))

Sue: Nash, remember the circle we had yesterday about the problems outside on the playground? ((shakes head yes)) Well, I printed your picture out from that morning. I called it “Thinking It Over” in my notes. Does it remind you of what your friends said?

Nash: They said I was mean and bad.

Sue: What do you want to do when you go out today?

Nash: I’m gonna be good and play nicely.

Sue: What did Allan and Ned say you should do?

Nash: Oh yeah, they said I could ask first and not push or hit.
Sue: I know you like them. What did Kat say?
Nash: I don’t ‘member. Maybe (3.0) talk it over and be good to others.

Sue: This photo shows me that you are thinking about what they said. I was proud of the way you thought about your friends’ words. You really are a good guy to play with. Keep thinking ...you can go out now.

((Big smile, tight hug, jogs out.))

Reciprocal Relationships: Teacher and Children Acting for the Good of the Community

This dispute illustrates the premium I put on “talking it over.” It also clearly showed a pro-social community that was used to adapting to changes in behavior and attitude as they arose. The dialogues and the visual representations found throughout this study, and exemplified in this episode, supported my assumption that emotional intelligence could be nurtured and taught. Goleman’s contention (1995) that handling the emotions of others and recognizing the emotions in others were key elements in emotionally intelligent decision-making. They were clearly visible in this dialogue. When I looked back to the beginning of the year, I saw how the children had
changed. In this circle talk, they clearly articulated the norms of our community. They were actively constructing solutions to a very real problem. They were clear about what they expected and forthright about what would happen when those expectations were not met.

Nash was able to bounce back quickly from this setback. He was distressed, but actively involved in making things right with the community. Likewise, the children involved in the circle talk were able to recognize his distress and helped relieve it. The empathy they showed him, and the problem-solving approach that we took in this incident, helped the children tune into what Nash needed from the heated exchange.

Looking for ways to tie child perspective to teacher goals for a particular child is a teacher-initiated activity. Some of the work I did was responsive to a child’s immediate needs. The circle talk about Nash’s behavior on the playground was an example of that. Other
teacher-selected activities focused on whole group instruction and stood out for me. The Friend’s Chart (Figure 4.8) was discussed in circle talks and produced during a writer’s workshop. It built vocabulary about community. The kid grid was designed to help teacher and child think about the process of project development, so it fulfilled curricular and community goals, for example.

Building a network of reciprocal relationships from the ground up means that the teacher must be open to individual interpretations about classroom life. An active search for ways to embrace the diverse meaning of community within the community is mandatory. What children understand about the process of constructing a community can be aligned with teacher perceptions of an inclusive community. Philosophically speaking, “understanding means being able to elaborate a theory that gives meaning to the events and things of the world”, according to Malaguzzi (1993). As the year drew to a
close, theories, held by teacher and child, had to be spoken, listened to, and narrated in order for them to exist. With the community centered on the many ways we interacted with each other, new possibilities that enhanced the academic side of school emerged. Strategies employed within the course of the year relied on amiable interactions: peer collaboration in centers, one-on-one teacher intervention, specific child-initiated small groups formed to complete projects, critiques about ongoing center work, individual projects, and portfolio contributions that came to symbolize “the way we do things around here” (Allan, kid reporter, March, 2002). Those strategies affected the course of our community. Those methods of discourse created the healthy and emotionally intelligent community described here.
June 6, 2002  3:00 P.M.  It’s a chilly and overcast end to the year.  Kids are shivering as they change out of wet, sticky [swimming] suits, remnants of all day activity outside. Sand castles, shaving cream, squirt bottles, toys, and playground equipment litter the lawn. Our parent-supplied smorgasbord was a hit.  Even the veggies are gone. I call my class together for the last circle hoping to assess what we’ve learned about making friends at school. The children of course have other ideas...as they collect their book bags, summer folders, and portfolios, they leave some lasting images with me . . .

Donald gives me a quick hug and is gone with parent.
Jaz waves quietly, while Ned says I’m the best teacher he ever had.
Day, her mom, and brother hug me on the way out.
Allan wants me to have a good time and (head down) says I love you.
Matt hangs back behind his dad then hugs my shoulder as I help him pack.
Carl waves a cheery goodbye and blows kisses to all.
DJ says she’ll never let go until Jeff takes her hand for the bus.
Clov is crying and looks cold and sick.
Jo is already on his way to Chicago.
Nash picked up early and headed for a new house in Atlanta.
Char hugs me low, mom hugs me high and says I’ll see her youngest next year.
Dai with her mom lingers in the mailbox center, hangs by the door, cries softly.
Imani’s mom says she will keep going on the speech lessons over the summer.
Mica goes quickly to his sister’s graduation.
Kat is sad faced, lugging a huge backpack that she drags to the door.
Jan says I don’t want to go and stays for awhile to help clean up with her mom.
Dav will have a new school next year.  I wish Dav and mom a good summer.
Jeri is in Michigan.
Rett is the last child in the room collecting papers for summer work, he says.

When I return to the room at 3:45, I find a drawing and note from Rett propped on the chart.  It really does say what is in my heart after
this year of revelation. It reminds me how easily children can express what a community is and how it works. I have Rett’s work framed and hanging, ready for next year’s children to explore the landscape they will help create.

Figure 4.20: Rett’s drawing and sentence.

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.  
Marcel Proust
Throughout this study, I have compared the emerging aspect of community building to a landscape that is contoured and constructed by those that live it. I’ve talked about the mountain range of constructivism and one particular peak within it, social constructivism. I’ve discussed the elements of voice and perspective which inform creative ethnography and enrich the narrative story told here. I’ve described the shifting plates of child and teacher interpretation that sculpted a unique community and revealed the rivers of intention and motivation flowing underneath. Children and adults alike were propelled on the currents of friendship and relationship and became vitally
interested in the terrain they were traversing, together. Thick
forests of theory and practice anchored emerging themes in ground
that was fertile enough to grow reflection and a recursive
interpretation cycle. As the teacher and children used the cycle of
interpretation to focus their attention on the action, they were
creating a community that was learning how to dialogue and when to
critique.

In my effort to make community visible as it was being
constructed, certain assumptions surfaced. One hypothesis rested in
my belief that teacher and child would be able to dialogue and from
that dialogue, create a reciprocal relationship that would benefit both
parties. Chandler (1992) described the relationship in classroom
cultures as “dynamic, unfolding, constructed products of the
patterned ways of perceiving, believing, acting, and evaluating that
develop over time . . .” (p. 33). The unfolding of this classroom
culture, based on patterns of perception about friendship, revealed beliefs held by the child and teacher. Those beliefs were made public through documentation processes and caused other viewpoints about teaching and learning to emerge.

In chapter 2 of this dissertation, I cited many authors who have described classroom cultures and elucidated issues pertinent to my study. Peterson (1992) described a community based on the members perceptions of its norms. The norms of our community were co-constructed by teacher and child, based in action, and identified through circle talks, kid reporter interviews, and child work. The perceptions of those actions, which evolved over the course of the study, were tempered by the fact that more than one voice stated those norms.

Noddings (2002) wanted to create moral people who would, in turn, influence the course of local and national policies. While I was not
interested in national policies, I knew that going public with documentation about a co-constructed community could have larger consequences, locally. Noddings posited that “an environment in which moral life can flourish” is a prerequisite for educating moral people. Understanding self, she thought, “helps students appreciate their own group and criticize it as well” (p. 156). In my study “taking care of self” and “taking care of others” established a key part of the community’s environment early in September, 2001; the ability to support others in times of need.

Gardner (1993) and later, Goleman (1999) emphasized the importance of interpersonal intelligence and emotional intelligence in a world that was frequently conditioned to “watch out for number one.” Through the transcripts of circle talks, the photographic interpretations, and the activities presented in this study, a different ethic evolved that looked out for and outward.
New (1999) envisioned a community of early childhood educators that were committed to social change. The change I sought for the children and myself, spilled over into the thoughts and actions of teacher teammates who were willing to re-construct my role, if not their own, as they realized we were able to identify and describe how our community was made. My hope is that our work can spur other teachers and children on towards considering their power to act for the common good. The “common unity” that Webster used to describe community, seemed to coalesce, in this study, around the idea that friends could be made or lost. It became accepted and expected that dialogue would support children in either position.

Malaguzzi (1996) insisted that a community disconnected from the world around it was not one. Our community embraced the world in little ways which showed the children how large a community of caring
Documenting our view of inclusion invited other teachers and children within our area to do the same.

Corsaro (1985), Fernie et. al (1988), and Kantor (1992) suggested that seeing community-building as an ethnographic practice would make the process visible to teachers, children, and parents. In this study, I found insights, techniques, and tools which combined to reveal the social construction of a kindergarten classroom and make it visible to interested others. Through documentation, we could hear and see our community develop as the year progressed. The tools (photography, kid reporter interviews, teacher focus group discussions, and teacher and child interpretation of the actions before us) supported the child’s desire, and the teacher’s intention, to express and expose opinions about the life world we were co-constructing. Using social constructivism as a source of theoretical
perspective, I was able to link individual child action in projects, for example, to action that was beneficial to the entire community.

These opinions, based on research in the field, influenced my own study and convinced me that what a teacher values is not only important, it is the driving factor in what gets taught and how. The implication is clear, what a teacher values matters. Helping children understand teacher actions, and their own, is the point – values clarified are often values lived.

*Teacher Values and Community Building: A Starting Place*

Many teachers are able to articulate their values when asked. Within practice, however those values become less vocal and less visible. Fear of inconsistencies between value and action can cause new teachers to doubt themselves and veteran teachers to “close the door.” Documentation, research that is tied to the everyday life of
the classroom, can do much to keep the doors open. The following reflection questions, linked to my practice, and documented throughout my teacher journals, came from the co-construction process of this study that included teacher colleagues. Through these questions, an individual teacher or a staff of teachers could get to the heart of community building. Extrapolating from the framework in Chapter 2 that linked relevant literature to my desire to make community building visible, the questions offer alternative suggestions that may be worth pursuing.

- What could it mean to reveal and support one another’s potential?
- What role could documentation play in providing a mirror for children and teachers to see their own abilities at work for the good of the community?
- How can school environments support the role of the teacher and child as co researchers in learning?
• How could self critique for child and teacher enhance the community?
• What could documentation and the cycle of interpretation offer teachers that would connect values to action?

Implications, personal and professional, flow out of the study presented here. Connections to reflective journals, project work, photos, and interpretations abound. While the questions are not typical (staff meetings are rarely concerned about the deep philosophies that various teachers hold) grappling with any one of them could produce a change in the way teachers see children.

**Documentation: Mirror on Teacher/Child Action**

I focused on the question about documentation and the role it could play as a mirror for teacher and children to see their affect on the community. Because teacher and child were on a mutual discovery mission, we could both investigate what worked in our community. The insights we gained as we moved through the year, caused us to discard some behaviors that excluded others and construct other actions that
helped us stick together when times got tough. We wrestled with projects that were centered in the larger world and found we had much to contribute.

• We mourned the tragedy of September 11th and acted to help children in New York City know they were not alone.

• We worked to resolve problems that threatened to separate members of our community.

• We provoked conversations that revealed reciprocal relationships and created shared meanings about what friends do.

• We witnessed the power that knowledge can bring to the individual and the group through project development.

• We surpassed our district’s benchmark tests and learned to read, write, and compute in the process of building our community.

While the teacher in me was gratified to see a plan of action coming together, the researcher in me wanted to examine how it happened. The relationship between teacher and child established a
context for participation and observation to go both ways. I was able to move in and out of my roles precisely because the children became adept at moving in and out of their positions. The children were able to make decisions for the good of the community. They reviewed and reflected on their actions and proposed new directions for their own learning. The context that became our learning community encouraged children to teach each other. That freed me up to stand back and collect the data that reveals the voices of hope, intent, negotiation, and collaboration which characterize teacher and children interpretation in this study. Documenting that process unified the progress of building community and made it visible to those who chose to look more closely.

Examining my position as a key player in the community was tempered by the realization that I was not the only one. Early in the year, while discussing what a community was, Allan said community
was “... just the way we do things around here.” The comment stuck with me. As additional dialogue and interpretations emerged, they reverberated in my teacher heart and researcher mind as an apt description of what a learning community can do when the people involved in creating it are open to the thoughts of others.

*Many Voices Sharing Meaning Over Time*

Only through the multi-voiced context of children and teacher do other readers sense the expansive nature of this kind of schooling. Rather than conform to the standards movement sweeping across the country, I value and speak for the motivation and intention to learn. Careful examination of extensive field notes, video/audio/photographic transcriptions, structured and unstructured interviews of key informants, helped me consider that intention is apparent in my classroom; fluid and changeable, but definitely there.
Observing changes over time moved me inside and outside of the context, simultaneously. As a teacher/researcher, I found this aspect of the research to be especially difficult. My personal journal showed days when I mourned being the observer. My teaching career is characterized by action with children. It was challenging to “step out” of the teacher role and into the researcher mode. As the year progressed, however, the introspection that comes with the role (Spradley, 1980) allowed me the space to interpret not only the child’s actions as the learning community was formed, but also my own. By examining what I thought I knew best, I was able to see how much I had missed.

Dixon, Frank, & Green (1999) writing about classrooms as cultures that are constructed from shared knowledge, opened windows for conversations with children to be seen as “ethnographic acts” (p.4). Through that open window on teaching and learning as “shared knowledge”, my study also illuminates the purposefulness of seeing how a community is built. The culture that was mutually constructed by teacher and children was supported by: reflection on documentation, recursive interpretation (kid reporters, focus group
discussion, circle talks), and the realization that friendship and caring are essential starting points in the process.

Documentation, defined by Malaguzzi (1994) and displayed by Reggio Emilia’s schools, is capable of helping teachers and children reflect on the ways their values affect the world they are co-constructing. Our efforts at documentation led to signs of change within the school at large, too.

Photographs interpreted by the art teacher, is an example of one such change. She started intermingling the materials that the children were using with her thoughts about how the materials helped the child experience the concept of negative space she was trying to teach.

A first and second grade teacher used photographs of a field trip to educate parents about the purposes of the trip. His students wrote commentary that included feelings about being on a river walk. The non-fiction stories that evolved for the trip were shared on a large board and included parent insight about the adventure. One third and fourth grade teacher, created a booklet about test taking with her students, using photographs, drawings, and revealing text about the anxiety connected to testing. Simply put, the act of documenting and
displaying child and teacher interpretations, helped these teachers see their students “at promise” rather than “at risk.” Documenting incidents that keep “at promise” in front of a larger community, is significant in a population that includes children living in poverty and abundance.

Mallory & New (1994) included a changing teacher role in their paradigm shift: away from the dispenser of knowledge towards a responsibility to know each child in his/her own context. I see actions like those described here as value meeting practice. When teacher practice includes recognizing the child’s context, exciting things happen. These experiences, and the documentation that supported them, illustrate the shared meanings that evolve when teachers see working with children as stimulating and worth doing. Shared meanings that develop over time, have implications for teacher intentions, policy decisions, professional development, and parent understandings.

**Shared Meanings: Moving Others to Action**

Many parents and teachers see education as fragmented and directed increasingly by people who know nothing about it. Rather than
bemoan what seems to be, developing shared meanings, through documentation, can influence decisions made outside the classroom or school. Documentation, and the cycle of interpretation that drives it, targets the inclusive nature of knowledge. How? It provokes conversation that questions the assumptions people outside the classroom hold.

When I apply child/teacher interpretation to knowledge claims held by “the experts” alternative views emerge. For example, many administrators are caught in the testing net that tethers salary increases to scores. They could, through documentation and interpretation, show other sides of the argument. I presented this use of documentation at a school board meeting devoted to testing issues. Using a graph created by my kindergartners that included photos and transcriptions of circle talks, I displayed the number of hours kindergartners did not have access to their teachers while benchmark tests were being administered. Before the year was out, retired teachers were hired to administer the one on one benchmark tests while the teacher and children carried on with learning. This decision affected 81 elementary buildings and over 4,000 kindergarten
students in 1999. Well over 5,000 children were affected by 2001. There is power in representing what is actually happening in the trenches.

Shared meanings can also effect the way university educators view teachers and the work they do. If teacher/researchers are generating data that accesses experiences on the front line (Fook, 2002), then the inclusive nature of that kind of documentation broadens theoretical understandings as well. Experiences that are many, varied, and documented augment theoretical perspectives.

... a more inclusive and appropriate way of collecting data ... forces us to think about practice experience at how it happens ‘naturalistically’ so that we can approximate our methods to it, rather than necessarily creating or imposing more ‘artificial’ methods for data collection. Fook (2002, pp. 86-87.)

Fook goes on to caution researchers that experiences take place in contexts that influence the outcomes. “No one player has access to all aspects of the context at any one time.” (p.87). Documentation and the cycle of interpretation, can be viewed from many angles. Maximizing perspectives, capitalizing on teacher/child reflection, and suggesting new ways to work in collaboration with others,
documentation has the power to connect theorist and practitioner for the well being of the child.

*Revealing Intentions: Alternative Views of Teaching and Learning*

In Chapter 4, I used a Kid Grid (Figure 4.14) to make some of Jaz’s intentions known as she completed her project on stuffed animals. This incident does more than illustrate a process. With political lenses on, it could be viewed as representative of the will to know differently, rather than the need to know prescriptively. Open ended projects like Jaz’s have fallen out of favor as the march toward cut scores continues. Articles in *The Kappan* as recently as September, 2002, list concrete steps that could be taken to keep teachers teaching, and students learning. Benham Tye & O’Brien’s research (2002) worries over the profession that can’t seem to keep “enthusiastic, energetic, and productive” teachers. Their survey samples indicate that teachers: “... are required to teach more curriculum based on testing, (must let) creative talents ... go by the
wayside, and (have to use) state and district mandated materials”

rather than the many lessons teachers develop that fit the context of
their classroom and the children in them. The deadening effects of
unused potential is clear for children and teachers. Projects, on the
other hand, allow teacher and child the pleasure of making critical
decisions for themselves. Projects, and the documentation that can
flow from them, could return the focus to the intangible rewards of
teaching and boost morale. Scott, Stone, & Dinham (2001) observe:

...standardization of many aspects of teaching, contributes both to the much
noted increase in overall work load and to the erosion of pleasures of the job ... (such as) flexibility, challenge, creativity, working with and for people.
(pp.9-10)

Using the recursive teacher/child interpretation that unifies the
documenting experience, it would be possible to maximize the
opportunity to change focus, modify, generate more creative
responses, identify other issues, and share ideas locally. The point is,
increased public awareness about the field which are relevant and
vibrant, can transform what the public thinks teaching and learning are. Planning documentation with children and showing that work, can influence perceptions and reveal a teacher’s intention to educate the whole child.

Other notions of knowledge being fixed rather than fluid abound and need challenging. Using documentation and the cycle of interpretation, alternative views of education could be made visible.

School boards, PTA meetings, and political candidates are known to regurgitate what the media says schooling is. This is not a new phenomenon. Dewey (1902) appeared to be advocating for different sources of knowledge as well. His thoughts could be applied to the relationship between teacher and child. His perspective could be presented to people who have a stake in questioning the status quo and to people who act as if they are the status quo. An especially revealing interpretation about the child and the curriculum could be
showcased alongside today’s testing proliferation. Dewey’s juxtaposition of theory and practice is powerful. Show and tell is still vital and can be honored. Data with a face is influential.

Abandon the notion of subject-matter as something fixed and ready-made in itself, outside the child’s experience; cease thinking of the child’s experience as also something hard and fast; see it as something fluent, embryonic, vital; and realize that the child and the curriculum are simply two limits which define a single process. It is continuous reconstruction, moving from the child’s present experience out into that represented by the organized bodies of truth that we call studies. (Dewey, 1902, p. 189)

Revealing intentions through practice takes practice! It is the continual reconstruction of relationships within the classroom that gives documentation its variations and universal dimensions. Because dialogue was a part of the community, critical inquiry allowed me and the children a chance to disagree about the norms as they were being established. Jeri’s insistence on “having a circle talk” was as legitimate as mine. The fact that doubt, curiosity, and questioning were integral and creative elements in our community set up a space where relationships could be negotiated and re-negotiated.
Alternative views of teacher/student relationships like Freire’s (1993, p.50) pedagogy, are based on the premise that unequal “relations of power become a fundamental obstacle” to teaching and learning. Documentation that includes many voices vaults over this obstacle. In my data, it is clear that I lead discussion, make suggestions, and orchestrate experiences that widen the scope of the content work as it goes forward. The data also shows my regard for the ideas children have and the actions children do on their way to becoming more autonomous. Rather than seeing an all powerful teacher, documentation can put a knowledgeable child in charge of learning and exploring issues which are important to her. When a five year old feels confident about presenting his or her project to peers, and answers questions about its form and function, relationships shift and become more complex. That complexity is evidence that teacher
and child are creating a community that is open to change in both parties.

*Implications for Professional Development*

Wherever change comes from, and here I am arguing that it can come directly from the people on the front line, it can lead to rapids that are barely discernible at first. What seems like a gentle flow, explaining children’s intentions and motivations through circle talks and photographs, can quickly become a river rushing toward an examination of professional development. Since documentation is meant to be public, a consideration of professional consequences coming from it pour out on the landscape of a teaching/learning community.

- Documentation, in its many forms, could be adapted to faculty presentations. For example, grade level teams interested in particular experiences, can use its tools to augment scientific research.
• Continued application of documentation can inform political agendas. Seeing and hearing children and teachers engaged in critical thinking may suggest that policy should follow what businesses have long valued in its work force: the ability to make informed decisions.

• Educational research that supports a child’s point of view can come into focus and move to the front of the line. The gap that exists between graduate studies done “on” and done “with” children might be closed. Research that looks and listens closely to what children are experiencing and initiating in school might lead the field in new directions.

• Data stories that are produced while the documentation process is going forward can help the general public understand how individual and particular a child’s learning is. Those same stories may indicate that the best teachers make lessons culturally relevant.

• The cycle of interpretation that appeared in this study, and strengthened the bond between theory and practice, could be applicable from pre k to university levels.
• Funding for classroom-based research might be easier to find if the agencies could visualize the ways intention influences teacher expertise. Documentation makes teacher intentions visible.

• Professional development courses designed to examine the process of interpretation through photographs, artifacts, and transcripts may entice teachers interested in making their own learning highly individualized and meaningful.

• Teachers and parents could find new ways to collaborate under the auspices of documentation. Understandings of how a child learns could marry knowledge of what the child has learned.

• Accountability issues, so prevalent today, and based on the number of items known, could move into a different phase with documentation as one form of assessment. Rather than settle for a score, teachers, parents, and politicians could get a sense of how a classroom reflects democracy in action with documentation and the cycle of interpretation in place. Through interpretation, teachers and children can show the messy work of maintaining a democracy. Writ large, “taking care of others”
could encompass critical inquiry, budgeting decisions, and development projects.

- Making practice and theory visible and communicating to a wide audience through documentation, could bring the public back to public schools. Revealing the mission to teach all children could be demonstrated and debated locally as well as nationally. Using photographs, videos, and interpretation of community building, *in situ*, teachers could extend open arms to a community that is used to hearing the worst about its schools. It could also encourage more schools to do their best.

*Personal Implications*

Eventually, the landscape of schooling could change to reflect a message that considers how children and teachers create communities that replicate what we Americans say we believe. In my introduction, I questioned the importance of basing my research on relationships which, hopefully, would construct a particular community in my classroom. I worried that making the process visible would be
dismissed by teachers too busy with issues beyond their control. As my study developed, interpretation, based on multiple perspectives, did provide a measure of control for the children and me.

We established a forum (circle) that could soothe and provoke. We used tools that helped us make sense of the interactions around us. We went public with documentation which showed differing perspectives working to open up a silent classroom. Shouting above testing and the desire to quantify teaching and learning, we presented glimpses of what could be. It’s the kind of work which demands teachers work together to continuously improve their teaching. It’s the kind of process that encourages children to step forward with new ideas about how we can all get along.

The cycle of interpretation and the reflection that is part of it, assisted the children and me in declaring our expectations about learning. It put accountability out front using face to face interaction
rather than bureaucratic decrees. It supported my desire to critically examine the world we created together. Stigler & Hiebert (1999), argue that:

To do more than improve teaching in their own classrooms, to raise the standard of good teaching within the profession--this demands that teachers work together, sharing what they learn in their classrooms to help one another learn even more. It demands that they assume responsibility for building the profession. (p.146)

Documentation is one way I have found to “assume responsibility for building the profession.” In concert with colleagues, the process of documentation and the cycle of interpretation in this study, reaches out to many stakeholders, includes them in a vision of what can be, and celebrates what is right with schooling.
Final Reflections of a Teacher-Researcher

Any study that seeks to uncover and describe a seemingly known culture, is bound to have complications. Multiple voices, conflicting agendas, and the participant/observer role could easily derail a micro ethnography focusing on a world created by kindergartners and their teacher. There are many competing forces within a classroom. Trying to ascertain what makes a classroom a community is intricate. Formulating goals, and exposing them to the flux of daily life, is one way of clearing and organizing that confusion.
Goals: See More and Hear More

Telling a story of community building, as it evolved, was my ultimate goal. I was committed to eliciting child thinking and comparing it to child action I was observing. Difficulties with time management, curricular scope, and academic content were intertwined with that goal and ever present. As a teacher/researcher trying to balance individual and community input in reaching a goal, I constantly tacked between these two roles. The tools I used helped me see what I had been missing -- children from diverse backgrounds were capable of and motivated to make friends. This seems like such a simple statement, and yet, it has profound implications for me. Bringing friendship into the center of our curriculum was like seeing “the elephant” in the room. It was in the mix, and as the study went forward, the elephant moved front and center. Of course, the theme of friends came up many times over the years; many kindergarten teachers study
“friends”. The difference between that work and this work is huge. I was working to show friendship as a driving force in community-building. Using Reggio eyes, I saw possibilities emerge that helped me capture the fluid friendships that permeated my classroom.

Documentation supported the children’s notion of what a friend was. At the same time, documentation showed me (and made me listen more closely) to how we were co-constructing our relationships. In chapter 2 of this dissertation, I was “looking for ways to identify and interpret complex relationships.” By the end of the study, those complexities were seen and heard.

Sometimes the winds (direct instruction, curricular issues) favored knowledge from teacher to child. At other times, child to teacher knowledge steered the course of the research (photographs, kid reporters, child interpretations). Working in a community I was helping to build, put me inside it with disproportioned power. As I
struggled with telling the story from a child’s point of view, I knew my
teacher voice was persuasive, pervasive, and influential. Working
alongside children and becoming the prime mover in many classroom
decisions, presents situations that should be examined.

*Working With Children: Strategies that Strengthen Relationship*

*Between Teacher and Children*

It seems strange to consider working with children as a
complication when I see them as anything but. However, acknowledging
the power difference that exists in a classroom, and in a research
situation, is vital. Geertz characterized this unbalance of power in
1986. It can be applied to children and teacher/researchers:

> We cannot live other people’s lives, and it is a piece of bad faith for us to try. We
can but listen to what . . . they say about their lives. . . . Whatever sense we have
of how things stand with someone else’s inner life, we gain through their
expressions, not through some magical intrusion into their consciousness. It’s
all a matter of scratching surfaces. (1986, p. 373)
The surfaces I wanted to scratch were limited to the children within my home base. How I came to know the children is different than other teachers’ perceptions of them precisely because I was listening to their interpretations of our community, and responding in dynamic ways. I wanted them to respond to me. Indeed, my dissertation research demanded it. I also wanted the children to question each other. The mode of inquiry that developed as the children became members of the community, colors what happened and the way I tell our story. Teachers in the same learning area were not as committed to giving their students time to process the thoughts and actions that came out of our circle talks. It was a priority in my home base.

The depth of teacher/child relationships can be heard in circle talks and kid reporter interviews. That relationship, built on trust, common cause, and co-construction of knowledge is, nevertheless,
unequal. As an adult I can never hope to understand the totality of a child’s life but I can investigate the school part of it. I can promote what a child does on the way to becoming a member of a learning community. I can document the actions of a child and connect it to his or her right to make decisions.

Specific sets of needs (to read, write, compute, grow emotionally and socially) which my students have are supported by the expectation that those things will occur. Indeed, they did occur within the context of making community-building visible. Since those needs require full adult and child participation collaboration between us benefits both. Establishing a community that sees its role as questioning and problem solving, leads to academic outcomes that can affect young children for life.

Working with children also implies that the children want to work. In this regard, it is difficult to judge if I was simply “blessed” with a
great group this year or, if the work we were doing together helped the
children move quickly to action for the good of the community. Much
of the transcription seems to favor the later interpretation. The
strategies I used (circle talks, child/teacher photographs, photographic
screenings/interpretations, child journals, kid reporter interviews, and
the kid grids that accompanied project development and presentation)
strengthened the relationships between teacher and children, and
among children. Because relationships (friendship) were acknowledged
and used for curricular and research reasons, the intrinsic, but
frequently overlooked power in them, moved the class swiftly toward
community-building activities. The methods I used to involve the
children made the community inclusive, reactive, and reflexive.

A good example of method affecting relationships is the use of
the digital camera. Since I was teaching, facilitating, and keeping my
own journal during the community-building process, I taught the
children how to take pictures that would capture “friends helping each other.” Most of the photographs shown in this dissertation were taken by children. Whenever I am pictured, a child placed me in the frame. When the frame became part of our documentation, teacher initiated activity was seen. Without the children’s eyes on my role, and their interpretations of it, understanding that our community was co-constructed would have been less influential than it was. As Malaguzzi (1993) pointed out, “through documentation children become even more curious, interested, and confident as they contemplate the meaning of what they have achieved” (p. 63). The collaborative documentation process that evolved in our community, helped convince the children they could tackle issues that are usually considered “adult”.

Finally, this study has to come back to its beginning. The shifting landscape that at times threatened to obscure the very thing I sought,
the child’s perspective about community construction, created new places for us to dwell. Working with children and actively teaching them how to make and lose friends had byproducts that are just now visible. The early signs of confidence and the tentative steps towards talking over problems during circles in September, seem much firmer by the end of the study. By paying attention to what children were saying, by giving their thoughts, actions, and feelings value and life beyond the immediate confines of the school year, I affirmed the possibility that working with children is work worth doing. Implications of this position for other teachers, researchers, parents, and children were addressed more fully in Chapter 5.

**Gender and Race**

The context of my classroom described in Chapter 3, included information about race and gender. What isn’t made clear within the
body of the analysis of data, in Chapter 4, is how these two factors influenced decisions I made as a researcher. For instance, in November, 2001, I did a frequency count of the photographs and field note entries. I wondered in my journal if I was “missing someone” and speculated that the children I had more photos from and more contact with were developing a “special relationship” with me. I also thought that the “loudest mouth, most insistent learner” would receive the majority of my “ear.” I secretly worried that perhaps I was overlooking the significance of race and gender. Could I really interpret the actions of my African American students? Did I favor the Caucasian children in some way? Ned answered some questions for me. He is identified on the frequency count as student number 21. He is an African American leader in this community.

Ned became a central broker for compromise and negotiation as the year progressed. He was able to assert his influence on me and
other children to a high degree. I have many more photos of Ned because he was working as a collaborator with many different children in centers or on projects. He became a second teacher for the digital camera as well as the first child to complete and present a project. His power showed academically and socially.

Since most of my students were African American (17 out of 21) I analyzed the graph further and discovered that the difference, in numbers of photos taken, was directly linked to a child’s ability to use the digital camera. In November, 2001, some children were just beginning to use the camera while others were making rapid progress in doing so. Rather than a racial divide, a competency gap was evident. Based on the evidence (Appendix I) I redoubled my efforts to work with the children who were struggling to use the equipment.

An analysis of the field notes indicates a more accurate view: every child in my home base was contributing thoughts and
actions to our community building process. The transcripts support
this contention as well. Neither male nor female voices were dominant
in the discourse.

Although I identify and include the voices of kid reporters that
represented the racial and gender categories in my classroom, I did not
identify the other speakers as such throughout the study. Appendix J
lists the entire class roster categorized by race, gender, and lunch
option. The lunch labels of free, reduced, or full price were established
by the U. S. Department of Agriculture (July, 2002.) On lunch
application forms, if total annual income for a family of four, is the
same or less than $33,485, then a child can receive free or reduced
price meals.
When I analyzed Ned’s photograph and field note record, it was clear that he was showing signs of being a collaborative leader in our community. He contrasted with the leadership styles that other children and teachers were demonstrating. Although a rich supply of data exists on this topic, I could not, for ethical reasons, speculate on nor judge a teammate’s action regarding discipline nor a child’s use of bullying to coerce others. I knew that much of the documentation would be made public and concluded that it was not my purpose to evaluate people in the community who were visible and vulnerable.

People within the hierarchy of the school were skeptical about the value of explaining how kindergartners construct community. I did not take the time to find out why this was so. Instead, I let the photographs and the child/teacher interpretations articulate personal value systems.
Going public with provocative interpretations complicated relationships locally. While the data touches on the issue of adult collaboration through the focus group work in Chapter 4, I was conscious of weeding out teammate critique of practice that was potentially damaging to child or teacher. I felt responsible to those I portrayed and to those who read my work. Weaving together stories that explained interpretive actions of child and teacher helped me maintain personal boundaries. I made a conscious choice to respect the interpretations that each party supplied while reflecting on the photographs, circle talks, or teacher focus group questions. I was cautious about exposing problematic incidents and limited my scope to my own home base community. Because I operated within an open learning space, the impact of my work within the community was felt by other children and teachers as well. For ethical reasons, I chose not
to report the efforts towards community building that teacher
teammates and other children demonstrated.

In researching with children, I wanted to provide openings for
children.” (p.248) I purposely chose to document, with photographs
and interpretations, the everyday world of this group of
kindergartners. As soon as this part of the research went public,
further complications ensued. I was aware that my work had ends
other than simple academic ones. The photographs and the
interpretations that were displayed throughout the school had peculiar
power -- power to persuade and power to provoke a reconsideration of
current practice. Using documentation to generate conversations with
staff members, parents, and interested others was intentional. That
intention, established in the introduction of this study, still remains,
and is more fully discussed in Chapter 5.
Data Mass: Coping With Too Much

The mass of data (605 photographs, 20 hours of transcription, and three notebooks from the field) was another major complication of this study. Because I was interested in following the children as community was being formed, I may have fallen into the trap of too much data and too few questions. On the other hand, hand coding and sorting deep data about child/teacher interactions helped me see the incremental and recursive nature of community building.

Then too, additional data, not displayed in Chapter 4, shows how vested the children were in pleasing me. The alacrity with which they accepted and used the cycle of interpretation and the tools that went with it, convinced me early on that I would have to step back or step out from time to time to put distance between the children and me.
I saw this stance as “leaving room for the kids to question each other” according to my personal journal.

I know I missed chances to strengthen my relationship with some of the children when this happened. For example, as I discussed earlier in Chapter 4, I could have stuck with Dav’s search for a new friend a bit longer. I might have intervened and helped him see that friends could be a source of help socially and academically. Why didn’t I follow up on the signals he was sending? Was it because I was hoping another child would come forward to help him become fully vested in the community? Or, was I so focused on the “bigger picture” of community that was emerging, I missed this smaller opportunity of demonstrating it? As the year progressed, Dav continued to have difficulties finding friends and, at times, removed himself from the community. Being simultaneously inside and outside the field has its drawbacks.
Data Presentation Problems

The way I presented the data, with photographs, charts, models, and dialogic transcripts also produced problems. While the reading of it seems to flow, the actual chronology does not. To make sense of the elements that described our community, I had to cut and paste my way through extensive field notes and tapes to create coherence.

Because the process of presenting the data was recursive and multilayered, I often returned to original sources like the question matrix and the domain analysis worksheets (Appendix C) to group actions that supported a theme, as it was emerging. In chapter 3, for example, I started speculating, through memoing, how friendship and community could be linked. The theme was tantalizing: peeking out in my journals, the circle talks with kids, and the co-interpretation of actions that accompanied the photographs. Analyzing the data in chapter 4, showed friendship and community-building activities moving
to the forefront. The theme of friendship, linked to actions children and teacher initiated, indicated an inclusive community was forming.

“As it was emerging” should be read with emphasis. Because the research “waited to see” what was unfolding, I was faced with a trio of interpretive questions:

1. How could I layer the child’s voice and teacher’s voice in a textual way that was meaningful?

2. How could I write in a way that allowed me to tell only certain things about particular experiences?

3. How could I frame research, so close to my Self, in a scholarly way?
Tentative Discoveries About Data Presentation

Exploring each interpretive problem yielded some tentative discoveries:

• I found that using different fonts helped me keep the voice layers meaningful while writing up the study. Kidprint 14 represented photographs and interpretations that were displayed publicly. Geneva 10 indicated taped transcripts within circle talks and connoted teacher/child dialogue, for example. I also used field note codes, ON, MN, and TN, to keep track of my perspectives and understandings which were informing and framing the transcripts, interpretations, and photographs being discussed.

• Using memos, suggested by Charmaz (2000) and other constructivist grounded theorists, I was able to construct narratives that focused on interactions among children and teachers. Since writing is never neutral, I strategically used stories of community building interactions to tell a particular tale to a particular audience. For example, I started the teacher
focus group meeting about center change with comments from kid reporters. My students’ desire to have “more funner” centers was presented as a topic for discussion. Using the children’s words became a non-threatening way of broaching many other subjects that, from my perspective, needed teacher consensus.

• My agenda for the research was initially at odds with the tone of traditional scholarly dissertations. The models I saw seemed to lack the flavor of “life as it happens” that I was committed to capturing. I found that I could not position myself outside the action very often. I had to insert writing and methodology decisions, based on long time exposure and expertise in personalizing the story, into the record. I put together text that I hoped would be engaging and increase understanding about the complex relationships that exist in every classroom, whether they are visible or not.

Making community building overt by documenting and displaying relationships through circle talks, activities, photographs, and
interpretations of teacher/child, helped me uncover a concrete model of co-construction. The methodologies and the explicit tools of documentation mentioned in previous chapters, met up with implications of alternative courses of action in the final chapters.

The interpretive approach suggested by Erickson (1986), Kemmis & McTaggart (1986), and other social constructivists, and applied by Corsaro (1984) and Charmaz (2000), helped me place this study in a tradition that valued multiple voices and discreet analysis of events which occur in a classroom. That position was actualized by Malaguzzi in Reggio Emilia schools (1993) and Dixon, Frank, & Green (1999) working with school children as “ethnographers” in their own right. My own classroom work, spanning 30 years, includes close participation with children on projects that affected communities much larger than ours, but I never saw those projects as examples of
relationship-in-the-making until the interpretive framework was added to this study.

**How** a community is made visible became more powerful when the building process was viewed through multiple lenses. Those lens included research (Kantor & Fernie, 1989; Gardner, 1993; Peterson, 1992, Graue & Walsh, 1998, Spradley, 1980, and Polkinghorne, 1987) which opened my eyes to the possibility of examining the landscape of my classroom more closely. When, and if, this microethnography challenges other teachers to do similar studies, the discussion of **why** that is important will be back on the map. The map in hand will be distinctive. Through interpretation and documentation, the routes displayed could chart other ways to reach common unity.
GLOSSARY

Collaboration
Small groups of children and/or teachers working together for a common purpose. Inquiry, compromise, negotiation, and critical review frequently mark collaborative work.

Dialogue
The intention of dialogue is to gain new insights and to learn, rather than to convince others of a particular point of view or to win an argument. Dialogue has many benefits. It brings new insights to the group. It nurtures trust as a community constructs shared meaning about the work they do together. Dialogue facilitates discovery, exploration, and the seeking of new insights from divergent thinking.

Documentation
*Reggio* teachers see documentation as a way to inform the public about the work of the school. The analysis of the processes of learning and the interconnections between child theory and adult interpretation about hypotheses under consideration allow teachers and children to reflect and critique their work in progress. I use photographs and multiple child/teacher reflections about the work in my documentation. The voices that tell the story of how community comes into being is highlighted. It’s a qualitative approach to assessment that records student/teacher thinking, their work processes, and products.

Field Note Codes
Categories for observational notes are based on Corsaro’s work in 1985. He in turn relied on earlier conventions suggested by Strauss, 1964, and Schatzman and Strauss, 1973. I moved between these explanations of coding and simplified. My own tentative thoughts about the process of coding include:
GLOSSARY

ON Observational Notes describe events as they happen daily. Not much interpretation, often linked to audio or written transcriptions for clarity.

MN Methodological Notes suggest ways of furthering my study. I give myself advice in these notes, pose questions for later inquiry, and list ways to make the research work (ie. be relevant) for the participants involved in its construction.

TN Theoretical Notes represent attempts to develop the significance of a set of fieldnotes. I connect, across readings and study, to some general theories about relationships, for example. I used these notes as referents, trail markers if you will, to get through the maze of data that was accumulating. When I read only the TNs, I gained heart and direction for the scope and sequence of the study.

Life Worlds
William Corsaro (1985) describes “life worlds” as an environment shaped and shared by children as they experience their interactive responses to it and to the others that inhabit the environment. The child is viewed as the discoverer of a world endowed with meaning. Corsaro’s perspective includes thinking of the child as a social being within a social context. Through the growth of communication and language, and in interaction with others, a social world is constructed. The interpretive approach he takes as a researcher of early childhood, demands entry and involvement in children’s “life-worlds.”

Provocations
English speaking natives often have negative feelings about this word. Reggio teachers use verbal outpourings from teachers and children about a particular topic or event to challenge thought and action. Provocations can be set up by teachers or emerge from conversations and actions with children. I provoke dialogue and action by selecting problems for circle talks. Children are able to select circle topics as well. Center materials and content work connected to the “big idea”
GLOSSARY

under study, frequently challenges the child to act independently or with a small group. Project development is also a “provocation.”

Projects
Reggio teachers, in concert with children, select avenues of exploration that are based on concepts. Crowds, clouds, rain are examples of projects that can take months exploring. I tie project work to academic pursuits for my kindergartners, with reading, writing, and drawing components illustrating their comprehension of the topic under study. The topic can come from anywhere but, usually, it is first heard in dialogue with others.

Portfolios
Collections of student work (digital or actual) that show progress toward student/teacher/parent goals in the areas of reading, writing, math, and the arts. The working portfolios are used to communicate to child and parent, the potential strengths a student exhibits. The working portfolios are passed to the next teacher. Sections of it that may record special projects, or individual test scores, are sent home.

Reciprocal Relationships
Interactions with the capacity to evoke or provoke potential by revealing and supporting the unique qualities and abilities of all parties.

Shared Meaning
The understanding of a group that moves beyond each individual’s meaning to reveal the collective wisdom of a group.

N.B. These definitions are based on readings and personal practice. References to “Reggio teachers” came from The Hundred Languages of Children, by Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993. Reciprocal relationships and shared meaning definitions are from In Pursuit of Possibilities, by Quest International, the Surdna Foundation, 1999. Full information supplied in the bibliography.
APPENDIX A

DESCRIPTORS OF THE MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

Linguistic
Children who are highly linguistic think in words. They love reading, writing, telling stories, playing word games. They need books, tapes, writing tools, paper, diaries, dialogue, discussion, debate, and stories.

Logical-Mathematical
Children who are highly logical think by reasoning. They love experimenting, questioning, figuring out puzzles, calculating. They need materials to experiment with, science material, manipulatives, trips to the planetarium and science museum.

Spatial
Children who are highly spatial think in images and pictures. They love designing, drawing, visualizing, doodling. They need art, LEGO, video, movies, slides, imagination games, mazes, puzzles, illustrated books, trips to art museums.

Bodily-Kinesthetic
Children who are highly b-k think through somatic sensations. They love dance running, jumping, building, touching, gesturing. They need role play, drama, movement, things to build, sports and physical games, tactile experiences, hands-on learning.

Musical
Children who are highly musical think via rhythms and melodies. They love singing, whistling, humming, tapping feet and hands, listening. They need sing-along time, trips to concerts, music playing at home and school, musical instruments.

Interpersonal
Children who are highly interpersonal think by bouncing ideas off other people. They love leading, organizing, relating, manipulating, mediating, partying. They need friends, group games, social gatherings, community events, clubs, mentors/apprenticeships.

Intrapersonal
Children who are highly intrapersonal think in relation to their needs, feeling, and goals. They love setting goals, meditating, dreaming, planning, reflecting. They need secret places, time alone, self-paced projects, choices.

T. Armstrong (2000, p.22)
APPENDIX B

KIDS LEARNING AREA DAILY SCHEDULE

7:30 - 8:15 Teachers arrive, write charts, talk about plans, prep guiding reading/projects.

8:45 Instructional assistants on playground to help children enter.

9:00 Children arrive, write in journals, writing conferences, read books, talk quietly.

9:30 Children meet in homebase groups for discussion of daily plans, whole group literacy work (interactive writing, shared reading, phonemics/phonetics), songs, update on projects, problem solving.

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: Whole group instruction on Story elements. Interactive writing and sentence models are used to help the young child make the connection between reading/writing. Literacy extensions that support the young child’s desire to become a reader/writer are evident. Read alouds focusing on specific authors and themes are also heard at this time.

Wednesday: Arts for every child as he/she rotates through visual art, music, and movement with the teachers of these disciplines. Conscious effort is made to connect the arts to the theme under study or the project underway. Literacy components highlighted.

10:00 Centers: Our center philosophy revolves around the belief that children are responsible for their own learning and need the chance to select activities that are significant to them. The activities in the centers are developmental in nature. That means a child may select an entry level activity and then move on to activities that are progressively more challenging. The centers are our way of individualizing instruction and addressing the many intelligences that all people have and use for learning. Most center work makes the link between reading/writing obvious. Children are assigned centers (and assigned particular activities
too) that focus on the literacy components. They rotate through the centers in a 2 week block.

**Teacher Center:** Guided reading provides direct instruction in letter identification, sound/letter association, and concepts of print. Small books are read independently while the teacher monitors progress using a “running record”. Every child works with the teacher every day in this center. Children are grouped and regrouped according to skill levels during these guided reading sessions. Linguistic, auditory, kinesthetic and spatial aspects of multiple intelligences are in use.

**Follow Up Center:** Children work on activities that review and strengthen the concepts introduced during guided reading. Various manipulative are used to review story sequence, structure, and main idea. Working with words, taking them apart and putting them together in sentences further enhances the opportunity children have to practice independently. **Instructional Assistants** move through this center, as well as others, refocusing children’s attention on the work at hand, listening to rereadings of the texts introduced by the teacher, and encouraging children to do their best work. Interpersonal, logical, spatial and bodily/kinesthetic domains are in use.

**Reading Center:** Children work with peers to explore books, letters, sounds of letters, words, sentences and reading games. Special activities include: alphabet study, word composition, and sentence construction. A multitude of reading material is available to help the children think about projects and themes under study.

**Writing Center:** Children work (with adult help) to develop literacy skill(writing, reading, letter id, etc.) computer skills and small muscle coordination needed for the act of writing. Even though linguistic intelligence is emphasized here, the use of tactile, multidimensional activities insures that spatial, interpersonal, and auditory strengths are also challenged.

**Communication Center:** Children draw, write, and read correspondence to and from their friends in this center. Expressing meaning in the context of letters, notes, and pictures helps the young child find a reason to write. Personal message boxes are designed by each child. Linguistic and visual intelligences are strengthened. This is our version of “You've got mail!!”
**Listening Center:** Children listen to stories, poems, and songs. Sequencing story parts, identifying main characters, drawing and writing about the plot, summarizing the story, and retelling it using puppets and other props help children use their linguistic and auditory strengths. Activities are designed to reinforce the components of literacy and the concepts of print.

**Math Center:** Designed to engage children in the logical/mathematical way of thinking about problem solving, this center uses many manipulative to help the child develop the concepts of number, classification, geometry, algebraic thinking, and problem solving. Teacher made math games, commercial games, and puzzles offer a chance to review previously taught math concepts and challenge critical thinking skills.

**Discovery Center:** Children work independently on social studies, science, and health concepts. Using the activities to learn more about the theme under study, the children who are bodily/kinesthetic, spatial, and logical find a wealth of problem solving situations in this center. Personal adaption and interpretation of data collection call the interpersonal child into action.

**Art Center:** Children work independently in this center to create representations of their learning using various media (clay, wire, paint, pen, pencil etc). This center is very appealing to all, but particularly to those children capitalizing on their spatial, visual, and intrapersonal strengths. Teachers use the work from this center to understand/interpret a child’s thoughts about the theme under study.

**Computer Center:** Children work and explore the computer programs as they begin to use the keyboard, mouse, menus, and printers. The programs include: graphic design, word processing, as well as many living books. Logical/mathematical, spatial, auditory and visual intelligences are all used in this center.

**Dramatic Play Center:** Children work cooperatively and use their imaginations as well as social skills to create their play. They work on developing the skills of negotiation, compromise, and teamwork -- inter and intra personal strengths. Children will also have the opportunity to use reading, writing, and mathematical skills here. The center changes frequently to fit the theme under study.
APPENDIX B

Building Center: Children use their bodily/kinesthetic, interpersonal, and spatial intelligences to build structures, solve puzzles, and explore the material located here. Designing and building encourages sharing, problem solving, and small group projects. Children are urged to connect their writing to their line drawings of what they made and how they made it.

11:30 Clean up: Children and adults clean up centers and meet their homebase teachers for assessment and sharing of projects. The teacher also uses this time for whole group activities like shared reading, shared writing, and calendar.

11:45 Lunch: Children eat with their teachers and friends in the learning area.

12:15 Recess: Large muscle work, games, and fun with friends in the backyard playground.

12:45 Reading Tables: Children select books they have read and reread them to a friend. Some children receive tutoring during this time. Some children visit the library and check out books. The teacher also reads aloud and encourages individual children to read to the homebase. Instructional Assistants use this time to work one-on-one with children.

1:30 Content: Children work on developing concepts directly tied to the theme under study. A variety of strategies are used to emphasize research skills and the use of multi-media. The interpersonal intelligence is strengthened through the cooperative learning teams. Negotiation, play, and decision-making skills are pursued. Independent projects or “choices” can also develop during this time.

2:15 Math: Children work in their homebase on projects that emphasize the logical/mathematical intelligence. Partners, small groups, or whole group work revolves around the exploration and use of math concepts. Using a wide variety of manipulatives, children practice the concepts of: number, pattern, geometry, algebraic thinking, measurement, critical thinking, and problem solving.

3:00 Circle: Evaluate the day, discuss tomorrow, solve problems, eat snacks.

3:20 Bus: Teachers and aides escort children to their busses.
APPENDIX B

3:30  **Latchkey:** Children are walked to latchkey in the gym.

3:45  Teachers’ meetings, planning time, conferences, prep for tomorrow.
APPENDIX C

DOMAIN ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

**Child initiated** samples from data:
circle talks
centers
small group/partner work
individual projects
environment

*X is a way to Y*
circle talks are a way to build a learning community

___________ways to influence child choices
___________ways to make friends
___________ways to loose friends
___________ways to include friends
___________ways to exclude friends
___________ways to show a child’s agenda

*X is a motivator of Y*
projects are motivators for building a learning community

___________desire to create
___________desire to know
___________desire to share information
___________desire to influence others
___________desire to please teacher
___________desire to produce excellence
APPENDIX C

**X is a part of Y**
the arts (music, visual, movement) are a part of building a learning community

_________ part of child centered learning
_________ part of self-discovery
_________ part of cooperation
_________ part of negotiation
_________ part of building relationships (child:child)
_________ part of sharing skills

**X is used for Y**
centers are used to build a learning community

_________ materials to manipulate
_________ materials to share
_________ materials to explore/experience
_________ materials to explain
_________ materials to connect across curriculum

**X is a place for Y**
homebase/KIDS AREA is a place where community building happens

_________ place for action
_________ place where children meet
_________ place where events occur
_________ place for material display
_________ place for achieving child goals
_________ place for achieving teacher goals

**X is a kind of Y**
writing is a kind of child initiated activity that builds a learning community

_________ log/daily journal writing
_________ interactive writing
_________ book projects/publishing
_________ personal narratives
APPENDIX C

*X is a time for Y*
lunch is a time for building a learning community
________daily kid conversation
________planning for recess
________planning for P.M. projects
________extending invitations to older students
________reviewing the morning work
________recess is a time for building a learning community
________playground negotiation (rules for ad hoc games)
________walking and talking
________including some/excluding others
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>Activity, Child Initiated</th>
<th>Activity, Teacher Selected</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can I describe the Learning Community (LC) in detail?</td>
<td>What are some of the ways children use space?</td>
<td>What are some of the ways I use space?</td>
<td>Where do events take place?</td>
<td>What changes occur over time?</td>
<td>What places and spaces support relationships?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centers, meeting steps, lunch spaces, special needs room, homebases, outside, bathrooms, art spaces, physical spaces</td>
<td>Read, write, draw, listen, building, Lego work, move furniture to adapt space, rearrange dramatic play, sit, stand, lay, under tables, on steps</td>
<td>Guided reading groups, circle talks, interactive writing, time out, specific center locations, fluid fit activity, outside, group games, partner, small group work</td>
<td>Meeting steps, homebase circles, in the art spaces, on the playground stage, on the playground, COSI, Thurber house, library, neighborhood, city other learning areas</td>
<td>Less specific use of environs, kids take over circle talk and space, mailboxes moved, more time on read and write, child internalizes schedules, child adapts time to fit self</td>
<td>Lunch with teachers and friends, walking the beam outside, building center, light table, playing in the dollhouse, in writing center, at small desks, art center, clay, paint, sketch work, carpeted chair, whole team meetings, outside play, provocations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity, Child Initiated</td>
<td>Where does the child work?</td>
<td>Can I describe the children in detail?</td>
<td>Where do I place myself to assist?</td>
<td>What events does the child initiate?</td>
<td>When are the children involved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art, math, building centers, standing, hugging positions, in front of others, close to one another</td>
<td>See photos, artifacts, kid reporter interviews, child interpretation, teacher interpretation.</td>
<td>Sitting on the floor, one on one, small group work, project presentation, using center materials</td>
<td>Role plays, shared reading, puppet plays, math explanations, individual projects, birthday celebrations, contributions to web, circle talks</td>
<td>During centers, library time, webs, during R&amp;R, content specific, circles, recess, lunch, friendship, entry and exit times, choices, book buddies</td>
<td>Schedule allows it, partner math, trip planning, talking and listening in circle, reading aloud to group, joint projects encouraged, take care of others, take care of place, sharing of reading and writing texts, webbing process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity, Teacher Selected</td>
<td>Where do I work?</td>
<td>How does my role change?</td>
<td>Can I describe myself as teacher, researcher?</td>
<td>What events do I select?</td>
<td>When am I involved in child-initiated work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In front or from teacher chair, within the circle for discussions, at the head of the table for reading, standing with lights out to address whole LC</td>
<td>One on one vs. group &quot;voice&quot;, talking, looking to listening, nodding, personal notes vs. chart, laptop vs. comments on papers</td>
<td>Listening and learning, thinking and writing more than talking, my journal &quot;out&quot; as signal to kids, laptop, camera as documentation time</td>
<td>Connections to themes, to literature, to home, place and time for kid presentation of project</td>
<td>Project stages, kids write and draw ideas, when asked for resources, discussing progress, asking questions about form and format, setting up time to present project</td>
<td>Honest and loving, collaborative, challenging and critical, teacher and facilitator, both learning, enough explanation vs. too much, meaningful activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Where are the places events occur?</th>
<th>How is the child involved?</th>
<th>How am I involved?</th>
<th>What are the purposes of events?</th>
<th>How do events occur over time?</th>
<th>What events incorporate relationships?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steps, art classes, throughout area, back yard, front yard, trips around town, neighborhood</td>
<td>Audience and contributor to plans, participant, originator of play, dramatic play center, originator of art, art center</td>
<td>Prepare props, prepare center supplies, plan curriculum among themes, time schedule, judge appropriateness of activity, schedule time, judge appropriateness of activity</td>
<td>Celebrate academic achievement, sharing with entire school, connection to literacy eg. author visit, connections to theme, cross-curricular evaluation after the theme, information for parent</td>
<td>Plan and gather materials, feedback from kids, replan and web possibilities with kids, parent suggestions, newsletter feedback, child development, different concepts at different rates effect scheduling of events</td>
<td>Kids club, art extravaganza, lunch invitations, trips, zoo, city, MLK center, library, COSI, international night, letters of thanks, joint projects, spring fest, STRS tutors, invitations to share, playground cleanup</td>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>How does time affect the environment?</th>
<th>How does the child affect time?</th>
<th>How do I affect time?</th>
<th>How are the events affected by time?</th>
<th>Can I describe time periods in detail?</th>
<th>How does time affect child:teacher relationships?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Set up to streamline work, easy to adapt to circumstances, continuity of curriculum, team planning can determine schedule</td>
<td>Tired, sleeps, misses some curriculum, cries when project not completed, need more time for project, appeals to teacher</td>
<td>Important to child, make the time, lunch, recess, guided reading groups keep me from child, can jettison plan for cause</td>
<td>Scope of event; relation to time available, academic concerns, testing, team consensus vs. staff imperative, team event vs. school wide event, pace, tone, tempo of event changes with time schedules</td>
<td>See daily schedule, see fieldnotes</td>
<td>Arguments about use of it, controlling time can equal power, compromise about use of it, mixed messages about it, center work desirable but time limited, collaboration based around time in the day, kids see me as setting and keeping time, kids set time limits with each other for games and choices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning area set up, center work, changes mid-year, supply reasons to change</td>
<td>See kid grid, playmates, friends, partners, appeal for help, offer to help, phrases like &quot;Hey, I got an idea!&quot;</td>
<td>Decide when and what gets done, plan circle talks, photo teacher:child working together, gather materials, provoke discussion, eat lunch with small groups daily, arbitrate and mediate arguments</td>
<td>Arguments about use of controlling time can equal power, compromise about use, mixed messages about it, center work desirable but time limited, some collaboration based on time of day, kids see me as setting and keeping time, kids set time limits with each other in games</td>
<td>There is always another day. The full day packed with activity, time expands to fit the project and child, deadlines are made to be broken, handle things once, respect need to delay or reschedule for child and adult</td>
<td>See fieldnotes, child and teacher journals on same, photos and interpretation about about day, see focus group video transcripts, see team planning sheets</td>
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APPENDIX D

CHILDREN’S LITERATURE LIST

I selected these books to read aloud to my kindergartners as the year progressed. I focused on reading texts that had strong child characters and/or thought provoking dilemmas. Making mistakes and solving problems with the help of friends and family are major themes. This is a partial list. Full list available upon request.


APPENDIX D


Hello. This is Mrs. Wightman. School is starting soon and I wanted to talk to you about a project I am working on this school year. I’m calling the study, Building Community, Making It Visible: Kindergarten Constructions. I am conducting this research as part of the requirements for my doctorate in Early Childhood Education. I am interested in collecting photographs, video and audio tapes as well as your child’s work samples, as the year goes on.

These materials will help me understand the many ways kindergartners form classroom communities. I want to document how children work together to solve problems. I want to listen to their ideas about how community is constructed and include their voices in my research. My teammates, Susan Turner, Jim LeVally, and Elaine Long have also agreed to review your child’s work and suggest interpretations of it. I view them as a sounding board for the project. Of course, they too understand the confidentiality that must be maintained.

As the study goes forward, you would be able to see the work samples and the videos. You can listen to the audio tapes or read about them as they are transcribed. All the transcriptions, photographs, and video tapes will be available to you. In addition, I am planning to mount a documentation panel that will describe community building through a child’s eyes. This panel will be displayed in our learning area and during my dissertation defense at OSU. It will remain in my custody for future reference. You will receive a portfolio containing your child’s work and photographs that feature your child’s part in community building. Fieldnotes and transcriptions will be kept for one year following the dissertation’s approval. They will then be shredded.

I want you to know that you (your child’s) participation is voluntary. You may withdraw your child from the study at any time without prejudice to you or your child. Because this study is happening during the course of our usual school day, the daily schedule that I discussed with you at our parent meeting will remain the same.

Of course your child’s participation is confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without your prior consent.

Do you have any questions?
You can call me at home (263-4448) or at school (356-8069) if you have any additional questions. Dr. David Fernie (292-1527), my adviser, may also be contacted.
Thank you for allowing _________________________ to participate.
I’m anxious to document how ___________ goes about building our classroom community. See you soon.

Date of verbal consent _____________________________

Returned letter of consent yes no
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

I consent for my child to participate in research entitled: **Building Community, Making It Visible: Kindergarten Constructions.** I understand that the principle researcher is Dr. David Fernie from The Ohio State University and that Dr. Fernie is supervising the research of Susanne Wightman.

I understand that the purpose of this study is to understand how kindergarten children build community. The definition of community will be a joint effort between Mrs. Wightman and my child. Teachers, Susan Turner, Jim LeVally, and Elaine Long have also agreed to act as a sounding board for Mrs. Wightman. They understand that confidentiality must be maintained as they review a child's work, or other materials generated, in their focus group meeting once a month.

Mrs. Wightman has explained that she will be taking fieldnotes about my child's interaction with others. Further, she has explained that photographs, video tapes, audio tapes, and my child's work may be used as documents in this study.

I understand that Mrs. Wightman and I will talk about the study as it goes forward and that part of our parent conferences will provide me with updates on the progress of the study. I understand that I may withdraw my child at any time without prejudice to me or my child.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I raise before, during, or after the research is completed, will be answered by either or both of the researchers. If I have a question, I may reach Mrs. Wightman at home (263-4448), at school (365-8069), or by e-mail (bswightman@aol.com). Dr. David Fernie may also be contacted at OSU (292-1527).

I realize that my child's participation is confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my prior consent. The team teachers involved in the focus group discussions also acknowledge these same confidentiality restraints. My child's name and any details that could identify him/her will be changed in written reports to protect confidentiality.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely. A copy has been given to me.

Date __________________________________
Signed ________________________________
( parent of minor)

Signed ________________________________
(principle investigator or his authorized representative)
Witness ________________________________


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Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely. A copy has been given to me.

Date ________________________________
Signed ________________________________
   (parent of minor)
Signed ________________________________
   (principle investigator or his authorized representative)
Witness ________________________________
FOCUS GROUP LETTER OF CONSENT

I consent to participate in research entitled: **Building Community, Making It Visible: Kindergarten Constructions.** I understand that the principle researcher is Dr. David Fernie from The Ohio State University and that Dr. Fernie is supervising the research of Susanne Wightman.

I understand that the purpose of this study is to understand how kindergarten children build community. The definition of community will be a joint effort between Mrs. Wightman, the children in her homebase, and me.

Mrs. Wightman explained to me that specific dates will be established for us to meet and shape our discussion around the **Focus Group Topics** described on the previous page. Further, she explained that photographs, video tapes, audio tapes, and children’s work samples will be used to guide these discussions.

I understand that Mrs. Wightman and I will talk about the course of the study as it goes forward. Further, I understand that confidentiality regarding the review of child materials must be maintained during our focus group discussions.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I raise before, during, or after the research is completed, will be answered by either, or both of the researchers. If I have a question, I may reach Mrs. Wightman at home (263-4448) or at school (365-8069).

I realize that my participation is confidential also and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my prior consent. My name and any details that could identify me will be changed in written reports to protect confidentiality. I know that I can withdraw at any time without prejudice to me.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely. A copy has been given to me.

Date _______________________________

Signed _______________________________

Signed _______________________________

(principal investigator or his authorized representative)

Witness______________________________

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JAZ’S WRITING SAMPLES

Teacher dictated sentence 9/01
I have a big dog at home. Today I am going to take him to school.

I N R A D O C A T M
T O N O G C

Child initiated journal 12/01
I love and care for everybody. I give kisses and hugs to everyone.

I L O V E A N D C A R E F O R E V E R Y B O D Y
I G I V E K I S S E S A N D H U G S T O E V E R Y W A

Child initiated journal 6/02
We are making cards for first grade teachers and we had a test before time. It was Mrs. Wightman told a story and made it up. We had to write the story after she told it. And it was (weird).

APPENDIX G

DESCRIPTION OF JAZ’S TEST SCORES

The kindergarten benchmark scores listed in the first table represent Jaz’s overall progress in reading from September, 2001 to May, 2002.

The following three tables respectively represent Jaz’s progress on the discrete tasks of: letter identification, reading and writing first and last name (Name Score) and hearing sounds and words (HSIW).

Additional information on text level reading was collected using the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). Jaz moved from level A (pre-primer) to level G (mid first grade) by the end of Kindergarten, 2002.
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

It is important to note that many of the focus group questions evolved or emerged from the kid reporters perspectives or circle talk dialogues that were taped. The guiding questions, listed below, found new ways of being answered over the course of the study.

What does community building mean in our/your learning area?
What evidence do we/you have to support that meaning?

^ Discuss student behavior that you think exemplifies your meaning.
^ Discuss student behavior that you think negates your meaning.

What classroom practices or rituals do we use to promote community?
How do our relationships with each other effect community building?
What plans or priorities help/hurt community building?
APPENDIX I

Fieldnote Count

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fieldnote Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Al</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ca</td>
</tr>
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November, 2001

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November, 2001
APPENDIX J

CLASS ROSTER
PSEUDO NAMES

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BIBLIOGRAPHY


Davies, B. (1976). *The culture of the child versus the culture of the teacher.* Centre for Behavioural Studies in Education, University of New England. ERIC.


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