PEER DIALOGUE AT LITERACY CENTERS
IN ONE FIRST-GRADE CLASSROOM

DISSERTATION

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* * * * *

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ABSTRACT

Pressley, Rankin, and Yokoi (2000) reported that 85% of first grade teachers nominated by supervisors as being effective in promoting literacy used literacy-learning centers. Using ethnographic methodologies, this naturalistic, qualitative study focused on the role of peer dialogue at literacy centers and how it supports the construction of literacy learning in a first-grade classroom. Classroom observations, including audio tapings, video recordings, artifact collections, and interviews with children allowed an in-depth investigation into how peer dialogue at literacy centers and an art center support children's literacy learning. In addition, the types of peer interactions in which children engage, and how children create and use psychological tools to promote literacy learning was explored. A total of 50 hours of peer dialogue was collected, transcribed and analyzed using the philosophy of coding analysis.

Using the social cultural constructivist theory posited by Vygotsky (1978), and research theories of Dyson (1993), the peer dialogue at the intersection of the unofficial social world of children and the official school world of children were analyzed to determine how peer dialogue supported literacy learning. Findings indicated that 47 of the 79 first-grade indicators from the Ohio Academic Content Standards for English Language Arts were utilized and strengthened through peer dialogue. However, analysis went deeper than looking at the "autonomous literacies" as described by Street (1985), and built on social-cultural theory and "ideological literacies" (Street, 1985) that are concerned with the functions of literacy and how it is used in a social system. The
literacy centers provided a space for children to practice both "autonomous" literacy skills and "ideological literacies" (Street, 1995) while socially constructing a peer group (Corsaro, 1997; Fernie, Kantor, Klein, Myer & Elgas, 1988). As teachers create both a physical space and a social space for peer dialogue, children construct a peer culture that uses literacy in multiple ways. This research can add to classroom practice as teachers see the impact of peer dialogue at literacy centers in supporting both literacy skills and literate behaviors.
Dedicated to my biggest fan
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No one makes a journey such as this without the support of many people. That being said, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the many that were supportive during this process. First, I want to express thanks to my parents who instilled in me a curiosity and love for learning. I appreciate their many words of encouragement and love that has sustained me not only in this process, but also in my life. I am grateful to my wonderful children, Megan, Elizabeth, and my son-in-law, Jordan whose patience and kind words gave me inspiration to continue on. And to Dan, the love of my life, who provided humor when humor was needed, kind words when kind words were needed, and a shoulder to lean on when a shoulder was needed. His constant and faithful compassion helped me keep my eyes on the goal. To all of my family, I say thank you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Two girls are reading: “The giraffe made her laugh.”
As they read the refrain, both girls break out in laughter.
Third girl approaches: “Can I read with you?”
First girl: “Yeah, but I’m reading it.”
Second girl: “Yeah, she reads it and I point.”
Now, all three girls read: “The giraffe made her laugh.”
All three girls laugh.
(informal observation, January 13, 2005)

Introduction

This first chapter provides a short summary of the study, including looking at the background and objectives of the study and reasons why this study is significant to the field of teaching and learning. After a brief look at the existing literature, specific research questions that I investigated during the course of the study are shared. The setting of the study is presented along with an overview of the methodologies that were used to collect data. Finally, the data analysis methods are discussed, followed by an overview of the organization of the study.
Background of the Study

In a survey about instructional practices of primary teachers in the United States who were nominated as effective in promoting literacy, 100% of kindergarten, 85% of first-grade, and 73% of second-grade teachers reported using learning centers (Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 2000). A learning center is a designated space in the classroom where teachers have their students work independently or in small groups while they themselves are engaged in small-group explicit teaching, allowing children to practice and apply literacy strategies that have previous been taught and or modeled. These centers, that have been variously referred to as “literacy centers” (Morrow, 2002; Nations & Alonso, 2001; Owocki, 2005), “literacy work stations” (Diller, 2003), independent learning centers (Marriott, Kupperstein, Williams, & Connelly, 1997), or learning centers (Opitz, 1994) can and should be vehicles for allowing peer talk to occur among young children. Fundamentally, all of the above terms are similar in that they are work areas for children to complete tasks independently or in small groups. The various names for the centers refer to the general content that is delivered. It is common to use “centers” for math and science time, whereas a literacy center is a more specific type of learning center. In this study, the term “literacy center” will be used and will be defined as a specific set of materials arranged to encourage collaboration among peers and provide an opportunity for children to practice reading, writing, speaking, or listening skills. Literacy centers are more than the physical spaces set aside by the teacher. They are also social spaces where children interact with one another and work together with materials. In this classroom, the physical space for a literacy center was created by a table with supplies placed on it or on a rug next to a shelf with materials on it. The social space was created by interactions
between peers. Children interacted with one another as they manipulated literacy materials and discussed shared experiences thus creating a “peer culture” (Corsaro, 2003).

If children are allowed to freely talk, share, and discuss with peers at literacy centers, they support and extend the dialogue that is important to them. The discussion can be authentic, not forced or assigned, but led by genuine questions, thoughts, and ideas. Thinking can be transformed and meaning can be made from abstract ideas whenever peers have a chance to ask each other questions, share theories, and talk about experiences, books, and other literacy events. As children share their ideas and listen to peers’ comments about those thoughts, they can construct meaning of the abstract. It is through talk that children can come face-to-face with their ideas, making them into something concrete – something they can refine, contemplate, shape, and act on (Lindfors, 1991).

Literacy centers provide an opportunity for teachers and students to share classroom power. As Whitmore (1997) stated, “In classrooms where learners’ talk is supported through more symmetric power and trust relationships between teachers and learners, the content and structure of discourse support and extend each other, inviting students to transform their thinking and change as language users and learners” (p. 102). Not only can literacy centers invite and allow students to practice and apply strategies that have been taught and modeled in shared and guided literacy lessons, but they can also transform understanding.
Impetus of the Study

My relationship to this research stems from both my academic training in Early Childhood Education and my professional experience as a teacher and director of preschool programs in both the private and public sectors in Ohio for the last 20 years. This background in teaching and directing has led me to believe that children socially construct their own knowledge; however, this has not always been my philosophy.

In my early days of teaching preschool, I would stand in front of a group of four-year-olds and have them practice drills so they would acquire the skills that I thought they needed. When children seemed unresponsive to my teaching methods, I decided to take classes on early childhood curriculum and development. As I learned about Developmentally Appropriate Practices (Bredekamp, 1987), I started to change the learning environment in my classes. Play, especially play at centers, became an important part of my teaching practice. Piaget (1969) and Trister-Dodge and Colker (1992) were influential in helping me think about the role of the environment and how to set it up for children to learn by interacting with the materials.

In 1991, I attended the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) conference in Denver, Colorado and heard much ado about a man named Vygotsky. Many passionate, early childhood educators listened, discussed, and debated the theories of this deceased Russian psychologist. I came away from the conference intrigued by Vygotsky’s (1978) idea that learning cannot be in isolation from the social interactions with others. In fact, he believed that any function in the child’s cultural development appears twice, or on two planes: first on the social plane, between a group of people as an interpsychological category; and then on the psychological plane,
individually within a person as an intrapsychological category. Thus, each new experience or dialogue with another person allowed the child to form and reform his/her understanding of ideas, concepts, and meanings. These new thoughts allowed me again to rethink my teaching practices and accommodate more dialogue and discussion among children.

In addition, I was intrigued by the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) that Vygotsky (1978) defined as the difference between one’s actual development level (i.e., what one can do independently) and one’s potential development level (i.e., what one can do when working with a more knowledgeable other). Thus, I began to believe that my role as teacher was more than to set the environment for the children; I could also take an active role in supporting and working with the children so they could accomplish new tasks. This included offering children tasks that they could not accomplish without the support of a more knowledgeable other.

As I became a co-constructor of knowledge with the children, working with them to question, explore, and discover new ideas, my preschool experiences began to look different. My interactions with the children were further changed as I joined a Reggio study group and read, discussed, and debated the ideas of Malaguzzi (1998), Vygotsky (1978), Edwards, Gandini and Forman (1998), Katz and Chard (1989), and Rinaldi (1998). The focus of my teaching became long-term projects that built on the interests of the children and used multiple ways of representing knowledge.

As I started a lab preschool at a small, Christian, liberal-arts college, I was elated that I would have the chance to impact future educators and their teaching praxis. I continued my studies, especially in the area of early literacy. My background in early
childhood, socio-constructivist learning, and early literacy propelled me to conduct research on how children support each other’s literacy development.

One day I was observing in a first-grade classroom. The children were to read a book of their choice and then draw a picture to go with the book, making sure to use speech bubbles in the drawing. I was intrigued as I watched one girl read a book about ten ghosts and how they would scare people out of a house so that they could live there. To illustrate the book the girl drew a house with ten windows and leaning out of each window was a ghost with the word “boo” written in an overhead speech bubble.

While the girl was working on the project, a boy came by and asked her about the book. She shared with him the storyline and how funny she thought it was and then asked him a question about why a black cat would scare a person. He explained the superstition that many people believe about black cats bringing bad luck and then they laughed together. The boy took the book and shared it with another boy and they laughed together before he brought the book back to the girl. When the teacher stopped to look at the girl’s work, she seemed happy with the drawing, but did not ask her about the book or share in the delight of the story. Instead, the teacher sternly stated that she would like to see more words in each speech bubble. The young girl added to her work as she complied with the request of the teacher.

In the scene above, I was struck by how much literacy learning had occurred that the teacher was unaware of. The girl had read a book, retold the story to a friend, learned of socially-constructed beliefs about black cats, and demonstrated her comprehension of the story as both her outward laughter and her concrete drawing of the text clearly showed. This incident caused me to wonder about the peer dialogue that transpires in a
classroom when the teacher is not present and how that dialogue supports children’s learning of literacy.

**Objective of the Study**

The objective of this study is to examine peer dialogue and explore how it supports the construction of literacy knowledge for students in a first-grade classroom during literacy center time. Furthermore, this research aims to identify the types of peer dialogue in which children engage as they interact with peers and with literacy centers. In the scene relayed in the opening to this chapter, we hear two girls engaged in reading practice. Both girls have assigned roles so each can participate in the reading of the text, one girl pointing, and one girl reading. By working together, they support each other in basic literacy practices and then share in the higher level task of comprehension. When a third girl asks to join, she is given the role of listening. She too laughs at the text, potentially demonstrating a level of comprehension. As illustrated in this scene, a literacy center can be a tool for children to support their own literacy development by participating together in reading, listening, and talking.

**Existing Literature**

Over the years, many teachers have reported using literacy centers and believe they enhance the learning of young children. Yet few studies have been conducted to understand the social interactions and the role that such interactions play in developing the literacy learning that occurs during literacy center time. While the literature to date has considered issues regarding set up, maintenance, and management of literacy centers (Diller, 2003; Nations & Alonso, 2001; Opitz & Ford, 2001; Owocki, 2005), only Sharkey (1992) and Morrow (2002) have focused their research on the significance and
benefits of using literacy centers as more than a management tool while the teacher is engaged in group work.

In 1992, Sharkey completed her dissertation on the literacy behaviors and social interactions of children during an independent reading and writing period. In the setting that she observed, the children were allowed to freely choose if they wanted to go to a literacy center, and they had more choices as to what to do and with whom to interact during the learning center time. In addition, the teacher was a participant at many of the centers and would interact with the children, thus creating small learning groups that received focused attention from the teacher. The dialogue was not between equal peers, but between a teacher and a small group, and the literacy centers were set up to build comprehension of texts. Even though Sharkey examined the group dynamics, she did not focus on the peer dialogue and the role it played in supporting literacy development.

Morrow (2002) is another scholar whose study on the significance and benefits of learning centers inspired the current research. She has been a long time contributor to understanding and using learning centers. While her work has mostly centered on how to design, organize, and manage learning centers, she briefly describes how groups are formed, the leadership roles children take on during the center time, peer tutoring, collaboration, and conflict resolution in her book, *The Literacy Center: Contexts for Reading and Writing* (2nd ed.). Her findings are more illustrative of the uses of learning centers rather than understanding how the interactions between children support the growth of literacy behaviors.
Statement of the Problem

Given the popularity and effectiveness of literacy centers in K-2 classrooms that are nominated as successful in literacy (Pressley, Yokoi, & Rankin, 2000), one might expect them to be studied and taught in teacher education programs. However, in textbooks for pre-service teacher candidates, literacy centers are briefly described as a way to manage classroom behavior while the teacher is working with a small group of children in a more directed or guided reading group (e.g., Farris, Fuhler, & Walther, 2004; Roe, Smith & Burns, 2005; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). It is unknown whether teacher-educators supplement the text with information regarding literacy centers. Moreover, we cannot assume that in-service teachers will go beyond using literacy centers as a convenient and utilitarian management tool.

Many teachers tend to perceive literacy centers as places where children can practice what they have already learned. They often overlook the role that literacy centers can play as learning tools for children to acquire new ideas. As one literacy coach (K. Gunderson, personal communication, 2005) shared with me in an informal conversation, many teachers find creating literacy centers a challenging task. Often, they fill literacy centers with worksheets or other closed-ended activities that resemble “seat work”, a practice that Fountas and Pinnell (1996) discourage, rather than creating purposeful applications of tasks that have been modeled and taught to students earlier.

In her book, Literacy Work Stations: Making Centers Work, Diller (2003) confesses that as a third-grade teacher she used centers as something extra for children who finished their work early. Again, literacy centers were considered a way to manage behavior as they allowed children who were quick at tasks to have something to do when
they were finished with their assigned work. She states that traditionally, learning centers were used as fun activities to motivate students to complete work.

The focus of instructional activity during literacy center time can shift when teachers appreciate the impact of peer dialogue on literacy development. Instead of using literacy centers as a management strategy to answer the question *What Are the Other Kids Doing While You Teach Small Groups?* as quoted from the book title by Marriott, Kupperstein, Williams, and Connelly (1997), or as a place for skills to be drilled through repeated practice, they can become avenues for ideas and thoughts to be strengthened. By providing time for children to wrestle with concepts presented through materials or by peer interactions and giving them the opportunity to talk, share with, and observe peers, children not only can practice what they know but also construct new understandings. These interactions allow children to adjust their thinking or accommodate those new ideas into their present understandings, thus creating new meaning (Piaget, 1969). With a better understanding of the benefits of literacy centers on literacy learning, teachers can use them more effectively in their classrooms. As peer dialogue at literacy centers is studied and analyzed, new insights into the role of dialogue at literacy centers will be manifest.

**Significance of the Study**

This study has the potential to add to the understanding of literacy centers including why, how, and when to use them. By realizing the implications of these centers for literacy learning, teacher-educators can provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to consider how to use literacy centers in their future classrooms. This study looks at the role of dialogue in helping children develop their literacy skills. It provides a new
perspective into the role of literacy centers, allows teacher-educators to rethink the time and instruction given to this topic in early literacy courses, and offers in-service teachers a better understanding of how to set up and use literacy centers in their classrooms.

Research on the role of peer dialogue at literacy centers in supporting children’s learning of literacy may help educators understand the role that discourse between students can play in acquiring literacy behaviors. This knowledge has the potential to change the way we, as teachers, set up learning centers and the latitude children have to interact with them. Even though literacy centers are depicted as a way to engage all students in meaningful literacy independent of the teacher (Morrow, 2002), for many teachers they are used to answer a question about classroom management, “While I (the teacher) am working with a group of in guided reading, what are the rest of the children doing?” (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, p. 53). A systematic study of the outcomes associated with literacy centers can not only change, but enhance the focus of using literacy centers in the classroom.

**Research Focus and Questions**

My study will build on the work of Sharkey (1992) and Morrow (2002) as it looks at the collaborative learning experiences in which children engage as they create meaning from literacy centers in a first-grade classroom. Realizing that learning centers are a critical part of a successful literacy classroom, the following were formulated:

Research question #1:

How does peer dialogue at literacy centers and an art center in this first-grade classroom support children’s literacy learning?
Research question #2: (a subset of question one)

In what types of peer interactions do children engage as they interact with peers at literacy centers?

Research question #3:

How do children create and use artifacts as psychological tools to promote their literacy learning?

In the setting where the current research took place, an art center was used alongside traditional literacy centers. In thinking about the connection between art and literacy, a special focus on the peer dialogue at the art center in this first-grade classroom will be included in the analysis.

Overview of Methodology

This research was a naturalistic, qualitative study which borrowed from ethnographic methodologies and focused on the role of peer dialogue at literacy centers in a first grade classroom and how that dialogue supported children in the construction of literacy learning. Using methods similar to Dyson (1993) and Wells-Rowe (1994), I took on the role of a participant-observer, with little participation in the actual discourse among children, a method that Corsaro (1981) labels a reactive stance. In an effort to gain an insider’s perspective of the dialogue, I used a tape recorder to capture the children’ conversations while sitting far enough away from the small groups of children so as not to disturb their natural flow of conversation, yet close enough to take fieldnotes to augment the audio recordings.

This particular first-grade classroom was selected for both easy accessibility and teacher pedagogy. The classroom was within a short distance of my office, thus making it
possible for multiple trips to the site. However, the more important reason for choosing this classroom was the common educational philosophy between the teacher and me. Even though the relationship between us was new, we shared similar thoughts regarding teaching and learning. When I was searching for a classroom site, many colleagues suggested that I visit Mrs. Katola (pseudonym) and her classroom. At our first meeting in January 2005, our discussion about teaching pedagogy and beliefs about how young children learn revealed similar ideologies about teaching and learning. Our classroom management and teaching praxis were in alignment as we both valued the role of the child in the classroom and saw the child as capable and trustworthy in making decisions about his/her own learning (personal conversation, 2005). We both believed, and still do, in giving clear, explicit guidelines, while allowing children to have the opportunity and freedom to work with peers in the manner they choose. In addition, colleagues and parents alike recognized the teacher as an outstanding educator. Finally, her classroom utilized literacy centers as part of the normal daily activity, making naturalistic observations obtainable without disrupting the classroom.

I made observations twice a week for 16 weeks, chosen to coincide with the first semester of the school calendar, at various literacy centers including the listening center, the word zone center, the book nook center, and the poetry center. In addition, I included both the conversation at buddy reading time and the dialogue between children as they worked on a daily worksheet as these activities were a part of the literacy center time. I video recorded the art center during each day of observation and viewed the tapes when the children were not present. Along with observational fieldnotes, audiotapes, and video recordings, I also took photos and collected artifacts, such as writing samples that the
children produced as part of their work at the literacy centers. In addition, children participated in individual interviews to answer questions about their ideas and experiences at the various centers (Appendix A).

Ethnographic methods lend themselves to copious amounts of data to organize, and this study was no exception. I transcribed and imported 27 audio recordings and 23 video recordings into the qualitative data analysis software program, Nud*ist 6, a Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching, and Theorizing qualitative research software program. I then coded these data to analyze and build theory of peer dialogue during literacy centers and how the interactions with peers helped develop literacy skills in young children. As I analyzed each code, I created a taxonomy that reflected the types of peer dialogue that were observed. Examples from this taxonomy supported the research question concerning the types of peer dialogue in which children engage at literacy centers. I conducted individual interviews with all 19 children, and these interviews were complied and analyzed as well. In addition, I used the data to demonstrate how literacy centers support literacy learning and how children use psychological tools to internalize and mediate literacy practices.

**Organization of the Study**

Chapter two provides an in-depth literature review that informs and provides the theoretical framework for the study. It looks at literacy learning (Hall, 1987; Lindfors, 1991; Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996; Street, 1995) as well as peer culture (Corsaro, 1988; Kantor, Elgas, & Fernie, 1993; Ramsey, 1991), peer dialogue (Cazden, 2001; Halliday, 1978; Mercer, 1995; Paratore & McCormack, 1997; Wells & Chang-Well, 1992; and Wells-Rowe, 1994), official and unofficial social worlds of children (Dyson, 1993),
social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978; Bodrova & Leong, 1996), and cognitive
development in a social context (Rogoff, 1990). Literacy centers (Diller, 2003; Morrow,
2005; Opitz, 1994; Opitz & Ford, 2001; Owocki, 2005) are examined in detail and a
connection between art and literacy development (Cecil & Lauritzen, 1994) is explored.
In chapter three a brief overview of the study is presented, followed by detailed
descriptions of the methodologies and a discussion of the reasons for choosing each
method. Chapter four provides an analysis of the data collected and insight to the
research questions. Finally, chapter five summarizes the key findings of the study and
explores the possibilities for future study in this area.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Anna: “I want to ask you something.”

[Anna moves in close to Tina and whispers.]

Zachary: “I heard that. You said that Zachary is funny.”

Tina: “That is not a question.”

Zachary: “A question is…”

Tina: “Like asking somebody something.”

Zachary: “Like, hey Miss Tina, when is lunch?”

Tina: “Yeah.”

Zachary: “Telling something is like saying, I saw an owl in a tree.”

Tina: “This is lunch time right here.”

Anna: “No it’s not.”

Tina: “I was just using it as an example.”

(October 26, 2006)

Children learn through interactions with others; that is, they socially construct knowledge when learning the ways, practices, and value systems of their culture.
(Vygotsky, 1978). In the preceding example, Anna is exposed to a concept which is unclear to her when Zachary and Tina, her peers, share the definition of the word “question” by explaining differences between a question and a statement. By discussing the concept with her peers, or on what Vygotsky labeled “an interpersonal plane,” Anna can begin to construct meaning for herself on an “intrapersonal plane.” Through dialogue, Tina and Zachary demonstrate their knowledge of the word question and share that knowledge with a peer.

This study examines how peer dialogue at literacy centers and an art center in one first grade classroom supports children’s literacy learning. First, an in-depth look at Vygotsky’s social-constructivism theory - the underlying theoretical framework for this research - will be explored. As part of that discussion, a close look at the zone of proximal development and how peers can be the more knowledgeable others in classroom dialogue will be investigated. In addition, an argument on the role of psychological tools in the development of higher mental processes, with a special emphasis on how language is a tool in this process, will be put forth. Also, a close examination of how children learn literacy will be considered. Next, I will identify and critically review literacy skills as addressed through the Ohio Academic Content Standards and the corresponding indicators for the first-grade curriculum. Then I will discuss various views on peer dialogue and how they relate to the current study with a special focus on how language is used to help create meaning, especially in the official and unofficial social worlds of school (Dyson, 1993). This chapter will lay the theoretical foundation for this study and provide a framework for the analysis of collected data.
Theoretical Framework

Constructivist Theory

First proposed by Jean Piaget, the constructivist theory asserts that a child’s interactions with his/her environment are what create meaning (1954). Piaget theorized that “every acquisition, from the simplest to the most complex, is regarded as a response to external stimuli” and “every newly established connection is integrated into an existing schematism” (1969, p. 5). He theorized that for a young child, “assimilation is essentially the utilization of the external environment by the subject to nourish his hereditary or acquired schemata” (Piaget, 1954, p. 351).

According to this theory, children learn best when they are manipulating their environment and constructing new knowledge. Think for a moment about a child who has experience with a toy truck - simple four-wheeled truck that you must push to make go. This child has a schema, or understanding of how to make toy trucks move. Later, the child is given a similar truck, but instead of pushing the truck to propel it forward, he/she must set it on the floor and pull back on it while holding on tight. When placed on the ground and released, the truck soars forward. When the child first plays with the second toy, it is difficult for her/him to grasp why he/she must pull the truck backward to make it go forward. These conflicts cause the child to experience a new idea which he/she must assimilate (Piaget, 1954) and then modify his/her understanding of how some toy trucks work to accommodate (Piaget, 1954) or change his/her schemata. This change in understanding is active, as the child is making modifications to old ideas to create or construct new knowledge. With each experience, assimilation and accommodation are in opposition; however, they are unable to be disconnected from one another as “the
formation of schemata through assimilation entails the utilization of external realities to which the former must accommodate” (Piaget, 1954, p. 352). This process the child undergoes is the foundational idea for the constructivist theory of cognitive learning proposed by Piaget.

**Social Constructivist Theory**

Vygotsky (1978) believed, as did Piaget (1969), that children construct their own knowledge; however, he went further to posit that cognitive construction cannot be separated from the social context. Whereas Piaget held that mental development or cognitive construction is based on four general factors: 1) maturation, 2) experience in the action performed upon objects, 3) social interaction, and 4) a process of equilibrium (Piaget, 1969, pp. 154-157), all of which are individual accomplishments, Vygotsky (1978) believed that cognitive construction is influenced and mediated by social interactions with others. Kozulin (1998), states that “for Piaget, the subject is an individual child, whose mind, through interaction with the physical and social world, arrives at the mature forms of reasoning,… but for Vygotsky, psychological activity has sociocultural characteristics from the very beginning” (p.39). We jointly construct knowledge as we talk, work, play, and interact with others on a social level. Each new experience or dialogue with another person allows one to form and reform one’s understanding of ideas, concepts, and meanings (Bakhtin, 1981). In fact, Vygotsky (1978) stated that “every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first on the social level, and later on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological)” (p. 57). According to Vygotsky, social relations or relations among people underlie all higher functions and
their relationships and learning cannot be in isolation from the social interactions with others.

Furthermore, because we are deeply connected to our current and past culture, development is embedded in a cultural history. It is through “cooperative dialogues with more knowledgeable members of their society during challenging tasks that … children learn to think and behave in ways that reflect their community’s culture” (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 19). As an adult, or more knowledgeable peer, shares social norms with a child, those norms can become a part of the child’s understanding, thus guiding his/her behavior and actions, and influencing his or her worldview.

*Psychological Tools*

Another idea that distinguishes Vygotsky’s (1978) theory from Piaget’s ideas is the idea of psychological tools to mediate higher mental functions, such as thinking and attention. The use of psychological tools mediates the movement of knowledge from the inter-personal level (social plane) to the intra-personal level (psychological plane). Vygotsky posited that we not only use physical tools for manual labor, but also construct and use psychological tools to extend our mental abilities. For example, with a dolly – a flat platform with wheels – a person can easily move a refrigerator. The dolly is a tool to help one physically do what he/she could not do on his/her own. “When a human being ties a knot in her handkerchief as a reminder, she is, in essence, constructing the process of memorizing by forcing an external object to remind her of something; she transforms remembering into an external activity” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 51). The knot is a psychological tool, or a “symbolic artifact that helps individuals master their own “natural” psychological functions of perception, memory, attention, and so on” (Kozulin,
Just as with the help of a “tool” one’s physical abilities are enhanced, with the use of psychological tools one’s higher mental levels are enhanced.

Psychological tools, in their external form, are artifacts such as graphic devices, maps, pictures, symbols, gestures, and language that facilitate one’s thoughts, memory, and other higher mental processes (Kozulin, 1998, p. 14). According to Vygotsky (1978), a human being’s mental processes can consist of both lower mental functions and higher mental functions; with lower mental functions developed primarily by maturation, whereas higher mental functions are cognitive processes attained through learning and teaching. “Higher mental functions are deliberate in that they are controlled by the person and their use is based on thought and choice; they are used on purpose” (Bodrova & Leong, 1996, p. 20). See Table 2.1 for characteristics of both lower mental functions and higher mental functions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lower Mental Functions</th>
<th>Higher Mental Functions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensation</td>
<td>Mediated perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactive attention</td>
<td>Focused attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spontaneous or associative memory</td>
<td>Deliberate memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensorimotor intelligence</td>
<td>Logical thinking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1: Lower and higher mental functions (Bodrova & Leong, 1996, p. 20).
A psychological tool is used to mediate a lower level mental function (e.g., reactive attention) to a higher level skill (e.g., focused attention). For example, if a loud noise or other novel activity occurs, a child will naturally react and attend to the event, demonstrating the lower level mental function of reactive attention. However, if a teacher uses a stuffed mouse as a sign or tool to remind the child to be quiet when others are talking, the mouse acts as a mediator or psychological tool, to help the child focus his/her attention, which is a higher level function. Rather than a child’s attention reacting to whatever is curious or new at the moment, with the support of a psychological tool, the attention can become focused. Thus a psychological tool is the mediator of a lower level mental function to a higher level cognitive function (Vygotsky, 1978).

**Characteristics of Psychological Tools**

Psychological tools are socially constructed. A stuffed mouse as a tool to mediate a child’s focused attention makes sense to a group of people in a culture where the term “quiet as a mouse” is common knowledge. However, in a culture where mice squeak and run rampant, the sign of a stuffed mouse to help focus one’s attention would not be understandable. In this way, psychological tools are fitted to the culture which they serve. Accepting how culture influences psychological tools facilitates our understanding that these tools influence a culture’s thinking. One could even ask whether cultures think differently because of the socially-constructed tools that have mediated higher level thinking.

In addition, psychological tools are temporary scaffolds to higher level cognitive functions. In the early stages, the tools have external and concrete appearances; however, once the user internalizes them, they become so much a part of the person that the user...
might not even think about them while using them (Ghassemzadeh, 2005). For example, a child may use the saying “your principal is your pal” to help him/her remember how to spell the word “principal” until he/she can spell the word automatically without the need for a mnemonic. In other words, as skills enter the intrapersonal plane, thus becoming a part of the person, the need for a particular psychological tool dissipates.

Language as a Psychological Tool

Even though there are many symbolic tools that help lead to higher mental functioning, such as memory aids, art, writing, diagrams, and maps, it is spoken language that is the major tool for influencing thinking and behavior (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). Spoken language not only allows us to share content, but it impacts our thinking and aids in our construction of new knowledge. Language, in all its representations, is symbolic for actions, thoughts, and artifacts. By using language to symbolize what we think, we construct and reconstruct our understanding of thoughts, actions, and artifacts. Bakhtin (1997) tells us that “language is inherently dialogic: every utterance actively responds to other utterances and equally shapes itself in anticipation of an addressee’s response” (p. 61). Each utterance generates a response in whoever receives it, even if that response is inner speech or private within the individual (Bakhtin, 1997). It is these language acts of listening, speaking, writing, and reading through which we connect with others on a social plane. These interactions with language, or utterances, help us to construct meaning.

Conversation, or talk between people, enhances learning. Ketch (2005) shared a conversational experience she had with a young child who had just finished reading Charlotte’s Web by E. B. White. She asked the child, “What is the story about?” The
child responded, “It is a story about a pig who wanted to be famous. He had a friend named Charlotte.” (p. 11). This kind of literal, shallow answer is typical in classrooms where skill and drill activities and right answers are valued. However, in classrooms where child-to-child or adult-to-child conversations are encouraged, deeper meaning and greater understanding of the story can be gained. Ketch went on to probe by asking the young reader to talk about friendships. As the conversation continued, the child’s eyes beamed and she said, “Charlotte was Wilbur’s friend. Charlotte gave so much for Wilbur that she had nothing left for herself. That’s friendship!” (Ketch, 2005, p.12). Through discussion with the teacher, the child was able to construct meaning on a deeper level.

As children talk, they are exposed to new insights, new ways of thinking, new perspectives. Not only is the dialogue important, but the social context in which the dialogue transpires helps to create meaning (Wells–Rowe, 1994). Thus, the social context of children working together in a literacy center can help them create meaning. Peer dialogue offers different ways of looking at an idea which causes new meanings to be constructed. Conversation is a means for critical thinking. One may have a schemata (Piaget, 1969) or idea or thought about a concept, but as we share our ideas with others and listen to their responses and thoughts, our concepts are changed and modified. That is, we socially construct knowledge. Dialogue with others allows us to clarify our understanding and strengthens our ability to express our thoughts. Dialogue may even cause us to reject our original ideas altogether, as we hear and accommodate new ideas from new perspectives. Whether we keep, modify, or change our understanding, our conversations with others lead to a more complex understanding of concepts.
Talking or sharing a conversation with a child helps him/her to construct knowledge and helps facilitate the child’s internalization of mental processes (Vygotsky, 1978). As children talk with a more knowledgeable other, they can internalize new words, understand new concepts, and explore new ways of understanding. Talking mediates a higher level mental function as the child thinks in a more abstract, and flexible manner. He/she does not need the actual object as he/she learns to create symbols (verbal and then later written) for an object. Language serves as a tool that allows the child to imagine, manipulate, and create new ideas.

**Learning Leads Development**

Finally, the social constructivist theory looks at how learning leads development rather than development leading learning. Instead of waiting until a child reaches a certain developmental level before providing various learning materials and experiences to a child, Vygotsky (1978) believed that children could construct learning at a higher level than a developmental level might indicate. “The first level can be called the actual developmental level,” (p. 85) or the level that a child demonstrates competence of a task on his/her own ability. However, with carefully posed questions or support from a more knowledgeable other, a child may be able to perform a task at a higher developmental level than he/she could do alone. Supporting this position is the idea that learning is a social process, mediated first on the social plane between the learner and more knowledgeable other and then incorporated by the individual on the intrapsychological or personal plane (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2003). Each person has his/her own level of understanding, but when interacting with a more knowledgeable other, he/she can move from a level of independent performance to a level of higher understanding. “The
distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” is called “the zone of proximal development” (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). This is a unique and important principle of social constructivist theory.

**Summary of Social Constructivist Theory**

Summarized by Lee and Smagorinsky (2003) and others, the core views of Vygotsky’s social constructivist theory are as follows:

1. Learning is actively constructed by an individual in relationship with a more knowledgeable other, not transmitted from teacher to learner. Meaning is constructed through interactions with others and with cultural tools.

2. Learning is mediated first on the interpsychological (or social) plane between two or more people and their cultural artifacts. After social mediation, knowledge is appropriated by individuals on the intrapsychological (individual) plane (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2003, p. 2).

3. Learning is a social process. Even when alone, the individual is in dialogical conversations with him/herself, or as Bakhtin (1997) states, “every utterance generates a response in the other who receives it, even if that response is only within inner speech (p. 5).

4. Furthermore, individuals are connected to each other through a cultural historical past. As each person passes on his/her understandings to others, cultural understandings are passed on.
5. Higher mental functioning and human actions in general are mediated by both
technical tools, and “psychological tools” (Wertsch, 1997, p. 28).
Psychological tools, or those signs and other symbolic devices constructed by
cultures, are used to mediate a lower level mental function to a higher level
mental function. Speech is a psychological tool and is regarded as the “tool of
tools” or the primary medium for learning, constructing meaning, and
transmitting cultural (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2003, p. 2).

6. Learning is not bound to development. Rather when a learner interacts with a
more knowledgeable other, he/she can move from a level of independent
performance to a level of assisted performance. Vygotsky called the level in
between these two performances the Zone of Proximal Development. In this
way, learning can lead development.
(Berk & Winsler, 1995; Bodrova & Leong, 1996; Kozulin, 1998; Lee &

Considering the social influences of learning is critical when one observes
children in dialogue with peers and adults. “Vygotsky believed that through social
interaction, peer groups facilitate language and concept development and, consequently,
higher mental functioning” (Althouse, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2003, p. 8). He also believed
that language plays a central role in mediating learning and, finally, that learning leads
development. The social context and the role of language in constructing knowledge are
crucial to understanding socio-cultural theory, which is the underlying theoretical
framework for how children construct knowledge used in this study.
Understanding Literacy

A leading question of this research is how does the peer dialogue that takes place at literacy centers and an art center in this first-grade classroom support children’s literacy learning? The first part of the chapter looked at learning or constructing knowledge from Vygotsky’s theory of social constructivism. Now, I will situate that question by discussing literacy learning. To do so, I will start with a short historical look at literacy, including a history of methods on how children learn to read, and then take a broader look at literacy that includes literacy as a social and cultural event. In addition, I will explore the New Literacy Studies. Finally, I will look at literacy events and the definition of literacy used in this study.

Historical Look at Literacy Learning

According to Goody and Watt (1963) and Olson (1977) “‘Literacy’ has historically referred to the acts of reading and writing and the cognitive consequences of such acts” (as cited in Finders, 1997, p.8). However, the acts of learning to read and write have a long history and varied past. In just the last 50 years, a myriad of ideas and approaches have been used to teach these skills. In the mid-1900’s, an approach known as the whole-word method (Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block, & Morrow, 2001) was widely used and featured the well-known Dick and Jane reading series. In this method, children in first grade would be introduced and taught several hundred sight words each year, so that by the end of third grade each child should have mastered about 1,700 words. In this approach, children were divided into reading groups based on ability, and each small group would work daily with the teacher. During small group time, each individual member of the reading group would read a portion of the text to the teacher.
Phonics instruction was not emphasized until the child had learned over fifty words and then the instruction was more about finding similarities in the patterns of words (Pressley et. al., 2001). However, not all children were successful in learning to read using this method, which led to controversy among reading researchers.

In 1955, Rudolf Flesch wrote the book *Why Johnny Can’t Read and What You Can Do about It* after which debate ensued about how to best teach reading. The book, which is still on the market today, argues that one can teach a child how to read in just minutes a day by teaching letter-sound relationships and basic phonics skills. In addition, Chall (1967) made a strong statement for phonics instruction in her book *Learning to Read: The Great Debate*, stating that teaching reading using a phonetic method was much more effective than the look-say approach. Following her book, there was a major shift in the way that reading was taught, and subsequently no more Dick and Jane books were published by Scott Foresman (Pressley, et. al., 2001).

Researchers like Bloomfield & Barnhart (1961), Dechant (1991), Fries (1963), and Gough (1985) spoke of reading as a code, and for a person to learn to decode, he/she needed to learn the alphabetic principle, understand the grapheme to phoneme relationships, learn to decipher small units and put them together to lead to positive recognition of every word through phonemic encoding. According to Hall (1987) this kind of literacy curriculum model was built on the following assumptions:

- Reading and writing are primarily visual-perceptual processes involving printed unit/sound relationships (p. 2);
- Children are not ready to learn to read and write until they are five or six years old (p. 2);
• Children have to be taught to be literate (p. 2);
• The teaching of literacy must be systematic and sequential in operation (p. 2);
• Proficiency in the “basic” skills has to be acquired before one can act in a literate way (p. 2);
• Teaching the “basic” skills is a neutral, value-free activity (p. 2).

Back and forth the debate over reading practices swayed, with phonics, or a skill-and-drill method, becoming a prominent reading method in the 1970s. Early in the 1980’s, researchers began to introduce a reading method called “whole-language” a reading method that focused on creating meaning from the text, rather than learning each individual letter–sound relationship (Pressley et al., 2001). An attractive feature of the whole-language classroom was the emphasis on the connections students made with the text. Whole language was and is not a cut and paste curriculum, but instead is a “philosophical stance” (Newman, 1985, p.1). “Whole language prefers learner-focused curricula and holds to a conception of the ‘whole child’ of the active learner, of the classroom as a community, and of teachers who learn and learners who teach” (Edelsky, Altwerger, and Flores, 1991, p. 7). Even though there were many visible benefits in whole-language classrooms, such as students responding to literature with more complex detail and understanding, students seeing themselves as readers and writers, and more engagement with reading and writing by students in classrooms (Pressley et. al, 2001), critics still made a strong case for phonics instruction. In New Zealand, Great Britain, and Canada, governmental support for the whole language movement or similar pedagogies soared, while in the United States, set against the back-to-basics cry and standardized test
scores, the whole-language movement was mostly a teachers’ movement, with limited support from administrators and teacher educators (Goodman, 1986).

Theories of Literacy Learning

The various methods of teaching reading were extrapolated from theories of literacy learning. Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984) examined three models of literacy learning, including a behaviorist model, a cognitive model, and a transactional model. Figure 2.1 helps one to understand the assumptions of each model and to situate the various debates on how to teach reading inside a learning model.
1. Environment → Learner

Behavioral View: Learning is the result of a Stimulus – Response bond. Problems in learning are problems in the delivery system. The learner is passive.

2. Environment ← Learner

Cognitive View: The learner is central. Learning is dependent on the assimilative schemas available in the head of the language learner.

3. Environment ←→ Learner

Transactional View: Meaning involves seeing objects as signs which have the potential to signify. Language is an open system. Semiotically this model is often rendered as a triangle with learner being posed as outside the triad; that is, taking the Object as a Sign to infer signification or Meaning which resides above the Object-Sign plane:

```
     Meaning
   ↘   ↗
     ≡
   Object     Sign
```

Figure 2.1: Models of Literacy Learning (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984).

The behaviorist view assumes that the environment, or the teacher, must tell, share, and “teach” the child, who is a passive listener. The teacher provides a stimulus, and the children respond; thus a stimulus – response or S–R bond is created as shown in Figure 2.1. In a classroom using the look-say method, teachers would use this model as children learned sight words. Likewise, those using a phonics approach to teaching reading would drill the children on the letter-sound associations and reward those who
were right by reacting positively to a desired response from a child thus reinforcing the response. In this model, children are conditioned to respond correctly to the teacher’s stimuli, and the right answer is paramount. Children learn to follow the models of the teacher as they learn the conventions of learning to read and write. Missing from this model is the learner and the role of the learner in creating meaning from the environment.

In the cognitive view of literacy learning, the learner is central and learning develops as a child assimilates new schemas based on cognitive dissonance. Based largely on the theories of Piaget and his colleagues, cognitivists posit that children not just model what they hear, but they construct their own rules of language based on what they experience (Goodman, 1990; Wells-Rowe, 1994). As demonstrated in Figure 2.1, cognitive development was because of the interaction the children had with the environment.

However, the transactional view holds that children interpret the rules of language through social interactions with others (Harste et. al., 1984). Again, looking at Figure 2.1, we see that in the transactional model, it is both the environment and the learner working together to create meaning. The transactional view assumes that meaning is created as one tries to make sense of the print setting. A printed word, when spoken, becomes a “sound image” that members of the same interpretive community have used to signify an object. Therefore, meaning can be different for different people and furthermore, can be different based on one’s experience with said object. In that respect, a word like ‘tree’ does not mean the same for everyone, but rather meaning is created based on one’s own experiences with the object. Thus ‘tree’ to a 3 year-old can mean shade and for a 52 year-old man the word ‘tree’ can mean a lot of raking. The transactional view is aligned with
the whole-language movement, and is about children creating meaning while trying to make sense of the print setting. Instead of breaking down each word into its smallest unit, learning language is about creating meaning. Whole language supporters posited that “language is learned best when the focus is not on the language but on the meaning being communicated” (Goodman, 1986, p.10).

Current Views of Literacy

By the early 1990s, the debate of whole-language instruction versus skill instruction reached such acrimonious heights that many labeled it “the reading wars” (Lemann, 1997). As supporters lined up on each side, “the framework (of whole-language) was widely misinterpreted” (Routman, 1996, p. 19). One of many misconceptions was that phonics was not a part of whole-language, yet Goodman (1986) tells us “Whole language teachers do not ignore phonics – rather they keep it in perspective of real reading and real writing (p. 38). As both whole language supporters and skill-based phonics supporters battled, a group of reading researchers, including Cazden, Delpit, Duffy, and McCaslin (Pressley et. al, 2001) begin to think, talk about, and support a more balanced approach to reading instruction. Adams (1990), in her landmark book *Beginning to Read*, made the case that skill instruction should be immersed in the reading of quality children’s literature, which many believe was the point of whole-language. Today, reading researchers call this a balanced reading program, and “emphasize the holistic process of reading as suggested by the whole language advocates, but ensure that students have a strong grounding in phonics as emphasized by the skills proponents (Routman, 1996, p. 9).
The classroom in which this study takes place is a literacy collaborative (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996) classroom, where skills are embedded in balanced reading and writing instruction. In this model, children benefit from listening and discussing quality children’s literature in read alouds, join in shared reading (Holdaway, 1979), take part in interactive writing, engage in guided reading groups and writer’s workshop (Fletcher & Portalupi, 1998; Graves, 1983; Graves, 1994), and participate in independent reading and writing activities as they learn to be literate.

Creating Meaning as a Social Process

Looking at how to teach reading and writing is only one part of literacy learning. McLane and McNamee (1990) state “Reading and writing is more than simply decoding and encoding print: they are ways of constructing and conveying meaning with written language” (p. 2). Children are meaning-makers (Wells, 1986). In the last few decades, many researchers such as Teale and Sulzby, Marie Clay, Kenneth and Yetta Goodman, and Frank Smith have come to regard reading as a natural process that involves the reader in linguistic, cognitive, and social strategies as they process letters and words into meaning (Hall, 1987). As they explored the ways in which children learned to read, it became more helpful to talk about literacy “emerging” within certain context, a term that Sulzby (1985) began to use to describe the learning to read behavior.

According to Hall (1987) this new way of thinking about literacy was useful for several reasons. First, it implied that the development of reading takes place within the child. Teachers can “teach” children about literacy, but the meaning must be constructed within the child. Second, emerging implies that it is a gradual process. It is a verb, which shows action of becoming. It is not a noun; either you are a “reader” or a “non-reader”. It
supports an understanding that meaning is constructed along the way and all parts of that process are reading. Thirdly, things do not “emerge” out of nothing. Something has to be there in the first place; as new information challenges known information, children construct knowledge.

People construct and convey meaning situated in a “big D” Discourse community, which Gee (1996) describes as a group of people with socially and culturally determined language practices, behaviors, and ways of thinking about the world. He argues that individuals acquire their primary Discourse through exposure, immersion, practice, and performing literacy tasks in relationship with their social and cultural surrounding, thus taking on the behaviors, values, and ways of thinking (Discourse) about literacy that the culture maintains (Gee, 2001). To more fully define literacy: it is both an individual cognitive ability as well as the social practices related to the reading and writing of text that people learn in cultures. Cultures include families, classrooms, and the peer culture that develops in every classroom (Banks, 2005; Corsaro, 2003; Gee, 2001). In summary, in this study literacy is conceptualized as individually and socially creating and interpreting meaning using verbal and visual symbols in social contexts.

McLane & McNamee (1990), Lindfors (1991), Wells (1986), Hall (1987), Harste et. al. (1984), as well as this study, conclude that literacy is about creating meaning. In addition, literacy learning is more than developing skills for reading and writing, but is also viewed as a social process (Bloome, 1985; Rogoff, 1990; Wells-Rowe, 1994). To broaden the definition of literacy as a social practice rather than an individual cognitive skill, the participation in local literacy events becomes important to understanding how children learn literacy. When children discuss a text, write notes to each other, share a
language event, or discuss literacy concepts, they are creating meaning about literacy skills through a social process. It is “the nature of the social interactions (which) influence how students will interact with and interpret a text” (Bloome, 1985, p. 30). Furthermore, literacy learning does not follow a stagnate and sequential step-by-step process; rather it has to do with one’s experiences, especially opportunities to negotiate, take risks, and determine one’s own intentions in using language (Hall, 1991).

**New Literacy Studies**

Previously, literacy has been regarded as a set of skills used to read and write; however, “more recently, literacy has been recognized as a social practice, something that people do in everyday life” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005, p. 11). The New Literacy Studies (NLS) as a field has been influenced by several researchers including Scribner and Cole (1981), who gave us the idea of domains of practice. “The word ‘domain’ refers to a particular space, or world where literacy is practiced (for example, the Church, the school, the home”) (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005, p. 13). Shirley Brice Heath (1983) gave detailed descriptions of how different communities in the rural Carolinas used language and literacy practices very differently. Gee (2001) wrote about Discourses or “ways of combining and coordinating words, deeds, thoughts, values, bodies, objects, tools, and technologies, and other people (at the appropriate times and places) so as to enact and recognize specific socially situated identities and activities” (p. 36). As this type of thinking is a shift from a more traditional look at literacy, controversy ensured, but Gee (2001), tells us that “an NLS perspective on language, learning, and literacy is neither “pro” nor “anti” skills (or, e.g., phonics) in any general way” (p. 37). Besides learning literacy skills, the child is acquiring “specific, socially situated identities, values,
attitudes, norms, ways with words, deeds and tools and so forth” (Gee, 2001, p. 38). The skills that a child needs for reading and writing are what Brian Street (1995) termed “autonomous” literacies; however, learning literacy is more than learning skills, but is also about “learning cultural models of identity and personhood” (p. 140). Street (1985) termed this type of literacy learning as “ideological”. Pahl & Rowsell (2005), state that ideological literacy can be used “to describe the way in which literacy is grounded in how it is used, and how it relates to power structures with society” (p. 14). Ideological literacy is concerned with the functions, or how literacy is used in society. In this paradigm, literacy practices involve becoming part of a social culture and understanding the ways in which literacies are used by members of a society. Children make use of their knowledge about literacies as representational systems and draw on their social understandings of what one does with literacy (Rowe, 2008). “An ideological model of literacy suggests that there are literacies rather than one literacy and that the use of these literacies creates engagement, involves wider networks, and is consistently related to the everyday lives of people in their communities” (Hall, 1998, p. 13).

**Literacy and Literacy Events Defined**

As I consider the research question, “How does the peer dialogue at literacy centers and an art center in this first-grade classroom support children’s literacy learning?” I need to answer the question, “What is literacy?” To answer that question, I thought about how to define a literacy event. According to Bloome (2005) a literacy event is “any event in which written language plays a nontrivial role” (p. 5); however, I wanted to think more broadly than written language for the definition used in this study. Turning to Dyson (1993), who defines a literacy event as “an activity engaged in by at
least one person (the focal child) involving the use of graphic media (print, drawing) for
some purpose and viewed by the child as a ‘reading’ or ‘writing’ activity (even if an adult
might consider it ‘drawing’ or ‘playing’)’” (p. 27), I found this definition seemed to more
fully encompass my thoughts about literacy events. For this study, I am defining a
literacy event as either an individual or shared activity centered on a reading, writing,
speaking, or listening activity in which children try to construct meaning about language
and/or interpret symbols of language. Based on this definition, this study on peer
dialogue is filled with literacy events. Now I will think about how interactions in literacy
events support literacy learning.

Thinking back to the beginning of the chapter, Anna, Zachary, and Tina are
engaged in a literacy event. Anna was exposed to the concept ‘question’, a very important
literacy skill, via a natural and likely social interaction between her and her peers during a
literacy event. From this vignette, we know that Anna was exposed to the word
“question” on a social – or interpsychological plane. Tina shared with Anna that she had
misused the term by stating, “That is not a question.” Then Tina completed Zachary’s
thoughts when he stated: “A question is…” Tina: “Like asking somebody something.”
Zachary demonstrated the concept by asking a question: “Like, hey Miss Tina, when is
lunch?” He then shared a statement as a contrast to a question: “Telling something is like
saying, I saw an owl in a tree.” Tina, Zachary, and Anna were sharing in a literacy event
on a social-plane. From this dialogue we are not sure that Anna has the understanding of
the new word on an intrapsychological plane, but based on socio-cultural constructivist
theory, she has had the opportunity to construct meaning of the term with the support of
more knowledgeable peers. The question remains, is interaction in literacy events supporting literacy learning?

To answer that question, look again at the definition of literacy used in this study: literacy is both a cognitive ability and a social/cultural knowledge that allows for interaction in a community: it is creating and interpreting meaning using verbal and visual symbols in a social context and is understood because it is culturally relevant. According to this definition, learning a literacy skill, such as the definition of the word ‘question’ and how to ask a question in a conversation, is literacy learning if the literacy skill helps the child to create meaning that is culturally relevant. So yes, engaging in literacy event, even events about literacy skills, are indicators of literacy learning. However, learning the definition for a word is what Street (1995) would term “autonomous” literacy. On a different level, we can think about an “ideological” literacy or a way in which children become members of a social institution (Street, 1995). Again, in the previous vignette, we see that Tina and Zachary supported Anna in becoming a member of the social world by supporting her in learning social/cultural knowledge that allows her to interact in their community. This study will explore the role of peer dialogue at literacy centers in supporting both autonomous literacy skills and ideological literacy learning in a first-grade classroom.

**Academic Content Standards**

**Historical Review of Academic Content Standards**

In 1997, a bipartisan Congressional initiative commissioned the director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), in consultation with the Secretary of Education, to assemble a national panel to conduct a mega-analysis
of reading research focusing on the effectiveness of approaches used to teach children how to read (Almasi, Garas-York, & Shanahan, 2006). Thus, the National Reading Panel (NRP) was formed. Included on the panel were 14 individuals of which 12 were university professors, one was a parent, and one was an elementary school principal. Of the 12 professors, one was a medical doctor and one was a teacher educator. Even though Congress stipulated “scientifically based reading research” as a criterion for a study to be included in the mega-analysis, the language used by Congress identified observational methods as valid “scientific research methods”; however, the language also noted that the analysis must “test stated hypotheses.” Since hypotheses are not included in qualitative research designs, all qualitative research studies were absent from the mega-analysis. Instead, the NRP concentrated on quantitative studies to determine the skills and practices for learning to read and write, leaving out a vast body of collected data by teachers and qualitative researchers (Almasi et. al, 2006). Amidst protest to the narrowness of studies selected, the research panel stood firm in using research with the following characteristics: experimental or quasi-experimental in design; published in peer-reviewed, English journals; and concentrating only on reading development.

Limiting the mega-analysis to quantitative research studies has been a major criticism of the reading panel (Almasi et. al, 2006). A second criticism of the panel was based on the narrowness of concepts studied. Just five areas of reading development were considered for review: (a) alphabetics (including phonemic awareness instruction and phonics instruction), (b) fluency, (c) comprehension, (d) teacher education and reading instruction, and (e) computer technology and reading instruction (NRP, 2000). The concern is not so much in what was included in the analysis, but what was left out (i.e.
student motivation, preschool literacy, the role of the home experiences in learning to read, etc. In addition, the past 30 years have seen major theoretical shifts in the field of reading as researchers move from a behaviorist paradigm to a cognitivist view to a sociocultural view of reading. The research that was analyzed did not include studies with a sociocultural theoretical framework as the majority of research using that framework is qualitative in design. In addition, the studies that were included tended to look at the use of and the teaching of “skills” rather than a process of learning to read (Krashen, 2001). Given that the research that was analyzed looked at discrete skills, the results discussed the individual skills needed for children to learn to read without looking at the process of reading to make meaning.

For that reason, a study by Almasi et. al. (2006) examined how the results from the NRP would be different if qualitative studies that met the criteria of the original report regarding comprehension were added into the mega-analysis. Surprisingly, they only identified 12 research studies that would have qualified for the meta-analysis. Using analytical methods, they did discover that the report would have expanded the conceptualization of the learning environment in supporting reading comprehension (Almasi et. al, 2006).

Despite the controversy and critique of the report of the reading panel, the NRP’s findings have led literacy education and teacher training in Ohio for the last 7 years as educators have seen an enormous thrust for “literacy” surging in our state. In 1997, the Ohio State Board of Education adopted the Ohio Literacy Initiative naming the following skills as general characteristics of reading success. They are:
• Hearing sounds in spoken words and distinguishing between words based on the different sounds.

• Understanding the relationships between letters and sounds and using this knowledge for decoding and spelling.

• Understanding how words and sentences are structured. Identifying the structure and following the development of different types of texts.

• Comprehending individual words by drawing on conceptual knowledge, making inferences, and using existing vocabulary.

• Comprehending text by integrating a variety of strategies.

• Relating new knowledge and ideas in text to current knowledge.

• Developing new understanding from those relationships.

Soon after Ohio adopted the Literacy Initiative, the NRP (2000) came out with their findings. These skills were integrated into the Ohio Academic Content Standards for English Language Arts. Finalized and adopted in 2001, the Ohio Academic Content Standards for English Language Arts were broken into 10 broad standards. Each standard has been divided by benchmark levels (K-3\textsuperscript{rd} grade, 4 – 7\textsuperscript{th} grade, 8-10\textsuperscript{th} grade, and 11-12\textsuperscript{th} grade) with literacy skills identified that are to be mastered by the end of the designated timeframe. To provide more detail, each grade level has indicators or skills that are to be mastered at that grade level. For a complete listing of the first grade indicators, see Appendix B.

**Impact on this Study**

In this study on how peer dialogue that takes place at literacy centers supports literacy learning, the indicators of the content standards will be included in the analysis.
This may seem like an oxymoron as the study has a more socio-cultural theoretical framework as a base, and the skills associated with the content standards are decontextualized skills; however, the ways in which children create meaning even when confronted with skill practice is worth study. Even though the analysis of dialogue will include an in-depth look at skills necessary for reading and writing as described in the Ohio Academic Content Standards, the functions of language or the ways in which children communicate, express ideas, create meaning will be discussed as they facilitate literacy learning.

**Literacy Centers as a Mode for Literacy Learning**

In Pressley, Rankin, and Yokoi’s (2000) work, first grade teachers were selected to participate in a survey regarding classroom practice. The selection criteria indicated that they had to be nominated by their supervisors as effectively promoting literacy. Of the first grade teachers surveyed 85% reported using literacy centers. Following is a brief history of learning centers as instructional tools.

**Historical Review of Learning Centers**

Learning centers gained popularity in the 1970’s during the open classroom movement (Thomas, 1975), in which schools were built without inside walls to promote an open environment. This would allow children of various ages to learn together in a community like atmosphere. The open classroom was built on the ideas of theorists such as Counts, Dewey, and Rugg and entailed more than removing the walls between classrooms (Day, 1975). The philosophy of an open-learning environment stretched the ideas of educators concerning children, learning, and the role of the teacher. Children were viewed as competent and eager to learn with learning being active and taking place
as the learner interacted with the environment. The philosophy purported that the child learned by inquiry and discovery in his/her own way and at his/her own pace. The role of the teacher was not to manipulate with rewards and punishments, but to aid children in developing respect, responsibility, and independence in learning (Day, 1975). Schools that followed this philosophy were built without walls in order to open up the space. This would allow room for many activities to engage a group of children simultaneously, freeing the teacher to roam the room and provide support as needed (Thomas, 1975). Learning centers were a huge component of the open learning environment and were used by teachers in traditional schools as a way to integrate the philosophy into an enclosed classroom. The following illustration from Voight’s (1975, p. 17) text *Invitation to Learning: The Learning Center Handbook*, exemplifies the shift in pedagogy that was taking place in the field of education.

Figure 2.2 Learning Centers in the Classroom (Voight, 1975, p. 17)
Learning centers in the 1970’s were used to motivate, diagnose, prescribe, differentiate, and enrich learning (Breyfogle, 1976; Thomas, 1975; Voight, 1975). Texts were written on how to set up and use learning centers in classroom. In addition, Voight (1975) created assessment tools to rate the effectiveness of various centers and the interaction between the center and the students.

However, even in the 1970’s learning centers were not a new concept. In the early 1900’s, Maria Montessori proposed the necessity of the learning environment with a wide range of didactic and varied activities. She believed that materials were to support each child at his/her point of development and to help perfect his/her capabilities (Montessori, 1912, 1973). These activities were on shelves; however, each child would choose his/her activity and set it up on an activity mat to use (Hainstock, 1986). Furthermore, in the 1950’s the term used was Interest Corner or Interest Station and was for individualizing instruction. In the 1960’s, the Administrator-Teacher-Learner Unit Organizational Pattern (ATLUOP) utilized open-ended learning activities for the students around social studies themes (Voight, 1975). Each new generation that looks at education through a child-centered lens seems to incorporate learning centers into its teaching methods.

**Current Views on Literacy Centers**

Today, many teachers report using literacy centers (Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 2000). Even though there are few research studies that focus on what occurs at literacy centers in primary grades, most teachers who use them agree that centers are beneficial for learning. Amidst the myriad of teacher resource books describing how, when, where, and what literacy centers are, there are anecdotal reports about how literacy centers focus on the literacy skills that children achieve, the responsibility they gain, and the social
skills that they accomplish by working together in collaborative ways (Opitz, 1994; Nations & Alonso, 2001; Marriott, Kupperstein, Williams, & Connelly, 1997; Morrow, 2002; Owocki, 2005). Teachers also report that literacy centers offer motivation and flexibility to meet the diverse needs of students. Because activities in centers can easily be modified to challenge all the academic levels in the classroom, they are appealing to teachers. When set up correctly, literacy centers can provide opportunities for purposeful and authentic literacy rather than busy work to keep children occupied while the teacher is working with a small reading group.

Many literacy centers in primary grades have been used to answer the question, which is also the title of a popular teacher resource, *What are the Other Kids Doing While You Teach Small Groups?* (Marriott, et. al., 1997). When listing the multiple advantages of literacy centers, Marriott et. al. stated that “most importantly, they give teachers large blocks of uninterrupted time to work with small groups of students” (1997, p. 3). Even though Marriott et. al. state that literacy centers are more than a student centered activity, they also list that one of the reasons to use literacy centers is to “emphasize and require application rather than teach new skills” and further state that “most instruction occurs during the small-group meetings” (Marriott et. al, 1997, p. 4). Thinking back to Figure 2.1 Models of literacy development, this type of thinking represents a cognitivist approach to literacy learning as children are expected to interact in teacher created spaces to apply and practice literacy skills that they have previously been taught.

More recently, Diller (2003) has been promoting the use of what she calls literacy work stations. This is a pedagogical shift for her as she tells readers that at one time, she
used centers as an extra activity for those children who finished their work earlier than the rest of the class. Currently, she supports and encourages teachers to create literacy centers to expand their students’ understanding of literacy. She defines a literacy work station as “…an area within the classroom where students work alone or interact with one another, using instructional materials to explore and expand their literacy” (Diller, 2003, p. 2-3). This emphasis reflects a more sociocultural view of literacy centers and is the view that this study embraces.

**Past Research on the Use of Literacy Centers**

Lesley Mandel Morrow has led the early childhood literacy field with her work on literacy centers. However, almost all her work has been done in classrooms where literacy centers were an optional activity for young children (Morrow, 2002). In addition, the teacher would interact with the children during their time at the literacy center. In these ways, her work is somewhat different than the current study where children are assigned to go a literacy center each day and participate at the center while the teacher is leading a guided reading group. Nevertheless, it is important to note that children in a classroom with an inviting classroom literacy center did have an increased interest in books (Morrow & Weinstein, 1986).

In a survey conducted by Morrow, Sharkey, and Firestone (1994), children and teachers were interviewed to determine their attitudes toward the literacy center time after implementing it in their classrooms. Teachers remarked that children liked to use the literacy centers for the following reasons: 1) They could choose activities they wanted to do; 2) They could choose either to read books or write; 3) They could choose to work alone or with others; and 4) They could choose to work with various manipulatives such
as puppets (Morrow, 2002). The common theme in the children’s responses suggests that children like choice in their learning.

Teachers reported that children learned the following at the literacy centers: 1) literacy skills such as vocabulary, comprehension, and a sense of story structure; and 2) increased knowledge about authors and illustrators, all while displaying a positive attitude toward reading (p. 88).

By participating in the program teachers said they learned that: 1) The social family atmosphere created by the independent reading and writing period is conducive to learning; 2) “Children are capable of cooperating and collaborating independently in reading and writing activities and learning from each other” (p. 87); 3) When there is choice of activity and people to work with, “children of all ability levels choose to work together” (p. 87); 4) “The program made me more flexible and spontaneous and a facilitator of learning rather than always a teaching” (p. 87); and 5) Children who don’t readily participate in reading and writing did so during literacy center time.

The children were asked what they learned in the literature program using literacy centers they answered: 1) “you learn to understand what you are reading and you learn a lot of new words” (p. 83); 2) “reading and writing is fun” (p.84); and 3) “it makes you like to read and write” (p. 84).

Sharkey (1992) built on Morrow’s work on literacy centers by using ethnographic methods of observation and interviews to study the outcomes of children’s skills in comprehension, the participation of children with special needs, development of appreciation for reading and literature, and changes in teachers’ perspectives regarding teaching. Like Morrow, Sharkey allowed children to choose when, where, and with
whom they interacted with at the literacy centers. Results from Sharkey’s (1992) study show increased reading comprehension and an increased appreciation of books by young children. She also saw a shift in teachers’ perspectives of the role of social interaction in learning.

Research Methodologies

The research methodologies used by various researchers have contributed to the research methods used in this study, even though their focus was not on literacy centers. For example, Deborah Wells-Rowe (1994), a participant/observer asked the research question how do young children become literate in a preschool classroom. Her methods of data collection were similar to this current study. Using qualitative methodologies of observations, field notes, artifact collection, audiotape, photographs, and interviews, she spent time in a preschool observing how young children become authors and how children use cognitive processes as they learned to write and draw (Wells–Rowe, 1994). Her work conveyed the ways in which children’s individual learning was decidedly social. In her own words “social interaction introduced information, presented confirmation and challenges to current knowledge, provided a means for exploring, refining, and testing new hypotheses, and shaped the learning strategies children internalized” (Wells-Rowe, 1994, p. 201). Her work is important in helping understand the role of a classroom community and the social interactions that support children in creating meaning in literacy. As she observed children, she saw that “children’s literacy learning involved spontaneous shifts of stance between using literacy to communicate and purposefully learning about literacy” (p. 36). This perspective is helpful in understanding how children use literacy behaviors to learn about literacy at the various
centers. As she noted, it was through authentic functions that children came to be authors. Another important piece of her work illustrated how the children formed shared understandings about literacy through the social interactions. This is particularly important in my work as I look at how peer dialogue supports literacy learning. A big difference between Wells-Rowe’s work and my research is that she not only looked at the interactions between peers, but also between peers and adults as they co-constructed learning.

Likewise, Dyson’s (1993) work with peer dialogue during writing sessions of first-grade children contributed to this current study. Her glimpse into literacy learning at the intersection of the two social worlds of children was paramount to this study, as I too looked at how literacy was learned in that intersection of the official and unofficial social worlds of children. Dyson’s (1993) goal was “to document how children build literacy tools from social and language resources” (p. 6). Her understanding of school literacy, especially writing, and how it emerged in the social worlds of children is fundamental to this study and how I looked at literacy being learned through the dialogue in children’s social worlds. In addition, her data collection methods were similar to mine.

However, the most similar work to my research is the recent work of Tolentino (2004). Using naturalistic research methods, she examined the role of peer talk in a preschool classroom with emergent readers and writers during explore time or work time. Video recordings of children interacting with each other during reading and writing events were analyzed to look for topics of conversation, roles and relationships between peers, and functions of language. The seven functions of language in Halliday’s taxonomy were observed during the literacy events along with two other emerging
functions: intrapersonal language (talk used to regulate oneself) and instructional language (talk used to teach other a concept or skill) (Tolentino, 2004). The work of Tolentino (2007) acts as a provocation to reconsider the role of peer talk at literacy centers as more than a time filler or skill practice, but as a tool for supporting children’s thoughts and interactions as the construct knowledge about literacy and the world.

A Closer Look at Peer Dialogue

Historically, common educational practices have rarely incorporated and/or valued talk between and among peers, even discouraging talk because it was seen as disruptive to the classroom (Mercer, 1995). However, when questioning how peer dialogue at literacy centers and an art center in a first-grade classroom support children’s literacy learning, it is important to take time to listen closely to what children are saying so as to gain a better understanding of what children know and are learning. Wells and Chang-Wells (1992) posit that a critical analysis of what someone has learned is his/her ability to use that knowledge to solve new problems. By listening to what children have to say as they work together to share ideas and solve problems, we come to understand their thinking and thought processes in a new way. This section of the chapter explores what we already know about peer dialogue by discussing theories of peer dialogue and functions of language.

Peer Dialogue in Supporting Learning

Both Piaget (1967) and Vygotsky (1978) respected the role that peer dialogue plays in cognitive development; however, each had a different perspective on how peer interactions contributed to development. For Piaget (1967) peer interactions are most productive when peers with different points of view discuss a problem as it is through
arguments with same age peers that children noticed that others have differing views. When a child is confronted with varying views, it causes him/her to have cognitive conflict. The child must “assimilate” or take in new information and make “accommodations” with existing schemata, leading to new constructions and deeper understandings (Piaget, 1954 p. 350). For cognitive learning, differences with peers were more beneficial than differences with adults because they caused the most conflict for the child “since children might superficially accept an adult’s perspective without critically examining it, out of unquestioning belief in the adult’s authority” (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Wells & Chang-Wells (1992) interpret Piaget’s thoughts about talk as more of an avenue “for the expression of thought and not as the medium in which thought is shaped and developed” (p. 27). For Piaget, the act of talking was helpful because of the cognitive conflict that came when two or more peers had different perspectives.

Agreeably, Vygotsky believed that cognitive development resulted from collaboration with other peers. He recognized that peer conflict could lead to better understanding, but he thought that would be true only if the peers resolved their conflict and moved to a joint understanding of the issue (Berk & Winsler, 1995).

Some have questioned the benefit of interactions with equal age peers, with one child acting as the more knowledgeable other in peer dialogue. Rogoff (1990) explored this question in her study about cognitive development in social contexts. In her review of research, she found several studies suggesting that equal cognitive status between peers might facilitate balanced discussion and yield cognitive progress in logic problems. Likewise, some studies in the USA and Europe that make comparisons of children working in groups or pairs, found value in collaborative learning rather than in
competitive learning while others have “shown how under some conditions working with a partner is less effective than working on your own” (Mercer, 1995, p. 92). One factor that seems to be critical in the success of group work is if the group must communicate and solve the problem collaboratively. In addition, Light (1993) found that talk facilitates understanding when children working in pairs on computer-based programs must use language (in this case, talk) to make plans and decisions regarding a problem. This would support Vygotsky’s thought that coming to a joint understanding is beneficial.

A study by Tudge (1990) that looked at the cognitive gains of students paired with more competent peers produced surprising results. Children were tested individually to determine their level on a problem solving a task that involved a balance beam and weights. After determining the level of each child in solving the problem, the researcher paired the children together to work jointly to solve the problem. The results indicated a surprising amount of regression for all children except the lower partners (p. 162). While those who were equal or superior to their partners in problem solving skills appeared to regress, the partner who was the weaker of the pair tended to improve.

Berk and Winsler (1995) cite early research studies on peer collaboration by Forman and Cazden (1985), and Forman and McPhail (1993) that indicate two important findings. First, children rarely showed cognitive conflict in the form of arguments, disagreements, and standoffs. This is significant because Piaget believed that the differences of opinion are what helped children construct new knowledge. Second, the level of cognitive growth depended on a combination of factors, including instructions given to children, tasks with modifications to make it appropriate for the group, and the quality of peer interactions (Berk & Winsler, 1995). “Peer interaction stimulates
cognitive development when children reach intersubjectivity – that is, when they work together toward common goals by merging perspectives and engaging in cooperative problem solving” (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 132). Cognitive gains were not observed in the absence of cooperation and sharing of ideas.

Anne Haas Dyson’s work suggests that children are not just meaning makers, but meaning negotiators who “adopt, resist, or stretch available words” (1997, p. 4). As children talked, discussed, and created stories about the superheroes that they knew, Dyson observed and recorded children’s interactions, demonstrating the dialogic potential of text and how children come to understand awareness between their thoughts and the thoughts of others (1997). She documented that many times a child would agree with a proposed storyline and then proceed to add to the plot, with each addition by a child supporting the creation of a story. Collaborative story narratives would evolve when children were drawing as their pictures would spark a conversation about a story character or lead to dramatic dialogue. As children interact with peers with different perspectives, meaning is negotiated and created. Moreover, children practiced and learned how to be literate in both the official and unofficial social worlds through dialogue with peers. “They learned how the written medium itself could accomplish valuable social ends” (Dyson, 1993, p. 106).

When children engage in tasks at literacy centers, they have the opportunity to work with peers who are more knowledgeable, less knowledgeable, and equally knowledgeable, thus leading and being led by others. Meaning of literacy events and artifacts is negotiated, created, and re-created to become significant for each child. Peer dialogue apart from adults allows children freedom to engage in extended discussion,
which Barnes and Todd (1977) suggest children will do when out of visible control of their teacher. In this current study, the teacher was in the room, but occupied at the reading table. Small groups of children worked together at the tasks at the literacy center, and were free to engage in dialogue to complete tasks, share information, or ask questions.

Forms of Peer Dialogue

Peer dialogue has been categorized, analyzed, and classified in various ways. See Table 2.2 Types of Peer Interactions as Categorized by Various Researchers for a brief summary of ways various researchers have categorized peer dialogue. Note however, that these researches included dialogue with peers and adults, rather than limiting their findings on the types of interactions between peers. Michael Halliday, in his seminal work on how young children use language, identified 7 functions of language or reasons why a child uses language (1973). The motivation for children to use language was based on what language could do for them, or how they could benefit from language in creating meaning. The first four functions of language he discussed, (i.e. instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal) help the child as he/she expresses physical, emotional, and social needs. The last three functions of language (i.e. heuristic, imaginative, and representational) are more to support the child as he/she comes to know and understand his/her environment. The functions are not hierarchal as a child may use one or many of the functions during one conversation. In addition, one does not stop using one function of language after commencing using another function.

However, others have classified language differently. For example, Mercer (1995) identifies three kinds of talk: disputational; cumulative; and exploratory whereas Cazden
(2001), discussed children’s discourse using four categories: spontaneous helping; assigned teaching; reciprocal critique; and collaborative problem solving. Conversely, Lindfors (1999) discusses children’s inquiry as attempts to engage another in one’s own act of understanding and discusses language that is used to connect with others, understand world, and reveal oneself in the world. Supporters of Vygotskian thought have described the following seven types of peer interactions as the most beneficial for development (Bodrova & Leong, 1996) including: (a) cooperating to complete a task – where children split task into chunks doing more together than on could do on his/her own; (b) assuming an assigned role – each child has a part in the activity; (c) acting as a sounding board – one peer explains his/her ideas to the other in order to externalize his/her internal thoughts; (d) acting for an imaginary person – or pretending to have a sounding board; (e) acting as an expert or novice – one child has a higher level of understanding and explains the task to a child with less knowledge; (f) playing – Using symbols to represent meanings; and (g) creating cognitive conflict – sharing various opinions and perspectives about a topic.

In this particular study, I chose to create a taxonomy of language based on how I heard children using language or types of peer dialogue being used. The language of the children incorporated both Halliday’s functions as well as interactions that Bodrova and Leong (1996) stated as most beneficial to development. In the analysis of peer dialogue, I was interested in what types of interactions children engage in at literacy centers and how that peer dialogue supports children in literacy learning.
Table 2.2  Types of Peer Interactions as Categorized by Various Researchers

One way to think about all of the various ways to classify children’s dialogue, is to look at the commonalities that each propose. Conversation, as Wells-Rowe (1994) states, is a tool with which children can express ideas and thoughts as they create meaning. Halliday states that “learning language is learning how to mean” (1973, p. 24). Lindfors (1999) reiterates that meaning is created by acts of inquiry. Mercer sees language as a social mode for thinking (1995), and Dyson (1997) found that when children were talking and writing, they were negotiating meaning. Bakhtin (1997) defines...
discourse as “the production of actualized meaning” stating, “Language … is responsive interaction between speakers, between self and other, that constitutes the capacity of language to produce new meaning” (p. 5). This study, too, looks at how children use language, especially dialogue between peers to create meaning. The question then is what does it mean to create meaning?

Creating Meaning with Language

Halliday (1975) explored how children use language to create meaning. His phrase “learning how to mean,” depicts meaning as a verb, like swimming or running. Since meaning is a verb, it is an action, a process, or something that emerges. Furthermore, Halliday posits that children learn how “to mean” in a social world. For example, when a baby reaches for something and the mother hands it to him/her, then the child learns that if he/she wants something, he/she must demonstrate that desire. The child learns to know that when one puts out a hand, it means I want that.

In addition, language is a vital way in which we represent our thoughts (Mercer, 1995, Vygotsky, 1978). Language, both written and verbal symbols, allows a person to express ideas, thoughts, or views about a topic. In addition, Loris Malaguzzi (cited in Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998, p. 3) shares in his poem, The Hundred Languages of Children, that “The child has a hundred languages (and a hundred hundred hundred more)”. Children learn to use language as symbols for what they are thinking. These symbols can either be written or verbal, but symbols support people in sharing understanding and knowledge about things. Through symbols, we can share what something means to us. Meaning is socially constructed as a word or verbal symbol can “mean” one thing to one person and “mean” something else to someone else. For
example, in the small town in which I now live, if you say you “ditched someone” it means that you cut in front of him/her in line; however, in my previous community, “ditching someone” meant that after arriving at an event with someone, you left him/her alone. It is the same word or verbal symbol, but has different meaning based on the social construction of the cultural group. As one interacts in a social group, one is exposed to the meaning of a verbal or written symbol, and that symbol takes on meaning – a meaning that is socially constructed in a cultural setting.

Meaning, according to Halliday, is more than knowing the symbols, but also knowing when each symbol is appropriate to use. Cattell (2000) recalls Halliday’s example of playing contract bridge. A person could very well be capable of saying the words ‘four hearts’, but meaning comes from knowing when it is appropriate to say ‘four hearts’. “Four hearts’ is meaningful in the game following ‘three no trumps’ or ‘four diamonds’, but not following ‘four spades’” (Cattell, 2000, p. 132). Since I know nothing about contract bridge, four hearts means nothing to me, no matter when it is said. Meaning is socially constructed and culturally understood.

The Social Worlds of Children: Both Official and Unofficial

When young children leave home and enter the educational arena, they encounter a new world, a world different than anything else they know, they enter the social world of school. However, this school world consists of two worlds: an official world and an unofficial world (Dyson, 1993). Furthermore, each child brings their cultural world, so in actuality, school is a place where for each child, three social worlds coexist: the official world of school; the unofficial world of school; and the cultural world that each child brings with him/her. In this study, I focus mainly on the dialogue of peers in the official
and unofficial worlds of school, however, it must be noted that each child’s unique culture influences the other two social worlds of school.

The Official Social World of Children

The official world of school is the view of school held by many adults. Educators and parents alike describe school as a classroom with a teacher, children, desks or tables, spelling tests, math worksheets, and books to learn to read. The official school world is filled with words and phrases like “teaching”, “standards”, “specials”, “learning to read”, and “summer break”. Adults remember taking tests, writing reports, and practicing math facts and use those memories to describe school— the official world of school.

In our current educational climate of Academic Content Standards, standardized testing, and No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the official world of school is critically scrutinized by various stakeholders including parents, administrators, community leaders, and legislators. Everyone wants to know how and what our children are learning. Testing is so prevalent that “it is estimated that children in second grade spend a total of a month on test preparation and standardized testing per year” (McAfee & Leong, 2007, p. 183). Many studies have been conducted on the official school world. However, what many people are unaware of is the unofficial world of school, the social cultural world that is created by “that group of kids who spend time together on an everyday basis” (Corsaro, 2003, p. 37) or “peers” in that classroom.

The Unofficial Social World of Children

As Dyson (1993) states, “within the social arrangements set by adults, a ‘critical mass’ of young children will construct their own social worlds, and they will do so with the tools of language” (p. 52). When children are put together in an official school world,
they use peer talk to share ideas, exert power, and gain control over an unofficial world: creating a peer culture (Corsaro, 1985) or a world under the radar of adult influences. In school, as well as in life, children participate in two social cultures, the adult culture and the child’s peer culture (Corsaro, 1997): the official world and the unofficial world (Dyson, 1993). Research into the social world of children is in many ways an unexplored world because once adults are present the language and actions of children change; however, currently, researchers like Holmes (1998) are challenging this difficulty.

Collins and Green (1992) remind us that the obvious task at school for students is learning the official content of schooling but remind us that children learn this content embedded in a peer culture. Quoting an unpublished paper by Fernie, Kantor, and Klein (1990) Collins and Green (1992) state, “Every classroom is a setting in which a social group constructs and reconstructs a “class culture” within a “schooling culture” (p. 61)

To better understand this social unofficial world, Corsaro (2003) took a “reactive entry strategy” (p. 10) in his research on the peer culture of young children. Stepping into a classroom, he became a “big kid”, interacting when invited and taking the role of a peer in the classroom setting. By doing so, Corsaro was able to learn much about the unofficial worlds of young children. Even though his work was in a preschool setting, it is relevant to this study in that it provides a theoretical framework for looking at literacy learning through both an official school world and an unofficial school world.

According to Corsaro, children want to obtain control of their lives, and they have a desire to share that control with peers. As children interact together in a classroom, they collectively create routines that they alone understand and enjoy. In the unofficial social worlds of children, dialogue between peers creates routines, rituals, and bonds that unite a
group of children into a peer culture. Barnes and Todd (1995) suggest that children participate in extended dialogue and discussion when interacting with peers out of the visible control of the teacher, allowing them to take an active role in constructing knowledge. It is the dialogue embedded in the peer culture that I will explore as I look at how peer dialogue supports a child’s literacy learning in both the official and unofficial social worlds of school.

First, I will look at how peer dialogue supports literacy learning in an official school world: a world of teachers, standards, and testing. The first part of the data analysis will explore ways in which peer dialogue helps children meet first-grade indicators from the Ohio Academic Content Standards. After exploring ways in which the goals of the official school worlds are met through peer dialogue, I will focus attention on the ways in which peer dialogue helps children create meaning and social understandings of literacy behaviors, based on the NLS. In many ways, this is the most important part of the research as it demonstrates the peer culture of a group and how meaning is constructed between peers.

Summary

Using Vygotsky’s (1978) theory that children learn first on the social level (interpersonal plane), and later on the individual level (intrapersonal plane) and that children use language to create meaning will provide the framework to analyze the data collected in this study. The first question I will explore is, “How does the peer dialogue that takes place during literacy centers (including an art center) support literacy learning in this first-grade classroom?” The first-grade indicators from the Ohio Academic Content Standards for English Language Arts will provide a mode to examine literacy
learning in this first-grade classroom. However, to only look at literacy learning through the official school world lens would not share the full significance of peer dialogue on literacy learning. Therefore, the dialogue of peers at the intersection where the official social world and the unofficial social world overlap will be examined to explore how children in this first-grade classroom used dialogue to learn literacy, and to affiliate with the peer culture. In addition, the question, “How does peer dialogue help children use socially constructed psychological tools to internalize and individually mediate meaning about literacy practices?”, will be discussed throughout the analysis.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research is a naturalistic, qualitative study that draws heavily on ethnographic methodologies and focuses on the role of peer dialogue in the construction of literacy knowledge for students in a first-grade classroom during literacy center time. According to Schwandt (2000), naturalistic inquiry has “a commitment to studying human action in some setting that is not contrived, manipulated, or artificially fashioned by the inquirer; hence the setting is said to be ‘natural’ or ‘naturally occurring’” (p. 174). Since I studied the behavior of first-grade children in their own classroom, a natural setting, while trying not to influence the situation, this study is a naturalistic inquiry.

Moreover, even though I was not living or becoming a part of the peer culture of first-graders, I did enter into their cultural world for a prolonged period of time. As Tedlock (2000) states, ethnography “combines research design, fieldwork, and various methods of inquiry to produce historically, politically, and personally situated accounts, descriptions, interpretations, and representations of human lives” (p. 455) and Schwandt (2000), defines ethnography as a process and product of describing and interpreting cultural behavior. Consequently, I chose ethnographic research methodologies as the best
tools to come to understand the literacy behaviors and knowledge of this particular group of children. This research follows the research of others who have also used ethnographic methods to expand understanding of the ways in which language increases children’s understanding literacy behaviors (Dyson, 1993; Wells-Rowe, 1994) and peer culture (Corsaro, 2003; Kantor, Elgis & Fernie, 1993). I believe, as did Hammersley (1992), that ethnographers can better “understand the beliefs, motivation, and behaviors of their subjects than … by using any other approach” (quoted in Tedlock, 2000, p. 456).

Broadly, the purpose of qualitative research is to record and understand the meaning of human actions (Schwandt, 2000), which is the aim of this study – to understand the role of peer dialogue during literacy centers in a first-grade classroom.

**Research Setting**

In order to comprehend the meaning of any research, one must be aware of the setting in which the study was conducted. A first-grade classroom at Arbor Mist Elementary School (pseudonym), one of six elementary schools in a small, rural district located in Central Ohio is the setting for this research. The population of the study included all 19 children (13 girls and 6 boys) enrolled in the selected first-grade class. Even though Mrs. Katola (pseudonym) was not a participant in the peer dialogue, her presence was also a factor in the study.

According to the 2005-2006 School Report Card for the Ohio Department of Education, the average daily student enrollment for Arbor Mist Elementary school was 311 students, 95.5% of whom were White, while the remaining 4.5% were labeled NC (not calculated. Used if fewer than 10 students in student group reliability). These included African-American, American Indian/Native Alaskan, Asian/Pacific Islander,
Hispanic, and Multi-Racial. Furthermore, 23.1% were economically disadvantaged and 15.9% were identified as students with disabilities. All children in this particular classroom were White. There were three children who were identified as students with disabilities, and each was on an Individualized Education Plan; however, the data were not analyzed concerning particular developmental levels.

The racial population of the school was representative of the district. Of the 4,039 students, 95.3% was White. The cooperating teacher in this study was a white female who had been teaching for 24 years – 14 of which were in the first grade. This research used a purposive sample, with participants that are considered typical, or representative of the population (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1996). The homogeneous racial student population limits the generalizability of the study to more diverse settings. As a researcher, I would prefer to work in a setting with a more diverse population; however, one reason that I selected this particular classroom was because of the proximity of conducting research at this site.

Besides the accessibility of the classroom and Mrs. Katola’s similar teaching philosophy to mine, this classroom was also selected because Mrs. Katola used independent literacy centers as part of her normal classroom praxis. In addition, the art center was used with the same status as the literacy centers, which allowed me to observe the connection between literacy and the arts. Finally, Mrs. Katola was willing to accept the conditions imposed by observational research methods, such as participating in an in-depth interview, allowing frequent observations in her classroom, the use of recording equipment (both audio and video), and the surveying of students. Even though this is in some ways a convenience sample, the sample is typical of the population of the school.
district in which the research was conducted. In this case, this research would not have been conducted without a sample that was accessible and convenient.

Independent learning centers were an integral part of the daily routine in this first-grade classroom, as Arbor Mist Elementary follows the literacy collaborative approach (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996) to a balanced reading program. Forming the backbone of the literacy collaborative are eight instructional components that support young children’s reading and writing development, with each component providing a varying degree of teacher support. Even though teachers use all eight components in a balanced reading program, they choose the element that matches the level of support that a child needs in his/her current stage of development and supports the child until he/she reaches the goal of being able to read and write independently. For example, a read aloud is a high level of teacher support, while independent reading is a low level. The eight components of the literacy collaborative include: Reading Aloud; Shared Reading; Guided Reading; Independent Reading; Shared Writing; Interactive Writing; Guided Writing (also known as Writer’s Workshop); and Independent Writing (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The following chart provides a brief overview of each component in addition to showing the relationship between the component and the level of teacher support. Literacy centers are used most often when the teacher is involved in teaching a small-group guided-reading lesson.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Component</th>
<th>Brief Description of Component</th>
<th>Level of Teacher Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Aloud</td>
<td>The teacher reads a book or other text to the children. Children actively listen to the text.</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Reading</td>
<td>The teacher reads an enlarged text to the children. Students read with the teacher as they come to know the text.</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided Reading</td>
<td>The teacher works with a small group of children with a text chosen specifically for that group. Teacher supports the child as he/she reads the text.</td>
<td>Medium Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Reading</td>
<td>The child chooses the text and reads independently.</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Writing</td>
<td>The teacher and children work together to create text. The teacher acts as a scribe, many times sharing writing strategies with the children as he/she writes.</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive Writing</td>
<td>The teacher and children work together to create text; however, the teacher and children “share the pen” to write the text. Children write letters, words, and sentences of the text.</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided Writing</td>
<td>The teacher will teach a mini-lesson, focused on one writing point. Children will have writing time to compose text. Teachers will conference with children about the writing.</td>
<td>Medium Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Writing</td>
<td>Children write on their own to create written pieces.</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Literacy collaborative table. (Summary complied from Fountas & Pinnell, 1996)
During the course of my research in Mrs. Katola’s first-grade classroom, the guided reading component of the literacy collaborative was used everyday. Mrs. Katola divided the class into five small groups for guided reading. Each group met with her or with Mrs. Mackel, a literacy specialist for 15-20 minutes each day. When a child was not meeting with his/her small group, he/she was asked to complete a literacy task at a literacy center for the day. These centers included Word Zone, Writing Center, Book Nook, Listening Center, and Art Center. In addition, each child would spend 10 minutes per session participating in Buddy Reading and would have an assigned literacy task, usually a worksheet, to complete. The focus of the research in this study is the peer dialogue that took place at the aforementioned literacy centers, in Buddy Reading, and during the literacy task assignment and how that peer dialogue supported children’s literacy learning.

Using a rotation chart or work board (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996), the children were assigned a literacy center each day. Mrs. Katola’s classroom differs from many other first-grade classrooms as children in her class were only assigned one literacy center each day. In many classrooms, children rotate between two or three different literacy centers each day, completing an assigned task at various centers. However, Mrs. Katola assigned each student to one literacy center per day, at which the child would have one specific task to complete. Following a ten-minute Buddy Reading time and an assigned worksheet, children would go to their assigned literacy center. Each child would have one task to do at that literacy center and after completing the task assigned, the child would be free to choose other literacy tasks at that same center. Since there were only 5 literacy centers and 19 children in the class, more than one child would be assigned to the same
center each day. Ms. Katola structured the rotation schedule so that the same groups of children were together each day. This allowed for a strong peer group to develop between small groups of children. Sometimes, but not always, the children were also in the same guided reading group. The length of time provided for literacy centers gave ample time for children to explore materials, work with peers, and practice literacy skills. For example, at the listening center, a common task would be to listen to one audiotape of a story while following along in the book and then to draw a picture of a favorite character from the story. After completing that task, the child was free to choose other literacy tasks at that same center, such as listening to another story on tape or drawing more pictures about the story. It was this freedom to choose that allowed for rich dialogue between peers.

While at a center, the child could be alone or could be with a small group of children, depending on who else was assigned to that literacy center that day and who was called away from the literacy center to go to a small guided-reading group. When the children were together at a center, I would observe the peer interactions and the dialogue that transpired among them. At first, I tried to use a rotation chart to provide equal time to record the interactions at each center; however, it soon became apparent that I would need to observe when and where there was a group of children.

Following in Figure 3.1 is a picture of each center along with a listing of common activities at that center.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illustration of Literacy Center</th>
<th>Name and Common Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Word Zone" /></td>
<td><strong>Word Zone</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create words with magnetic letters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find rhyming words and objects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stamp words using letters and stamp pad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Listening Center" /></td>
<td><strong>Listening Center</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to books on tape and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Draw your favorite character</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. List three facts from the book</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Draw the setting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Illustration of literacy centers
Table 3.1 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Book Nook</strong></th>
<th><strong>Writing Center</strong></th>
<th><strong>Art Center</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Photo</strong></td>
<td>Read books together</td>
<td>Illustrate poems</td>
<td>Paint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Find rhymes in books</td>
<td>Write letters</td>
<td>Create collages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Computer programs</td>
<td>Illustrate published books</td>
<td>Illustrate class-created stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Continued</strong></td>
<td><strong>Continued</strong></td>
<td><strong>Continued</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.1 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Buddy Reading</th>
<th>Daily Literacy Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choose books to read</td>
<td>Complete a worksheet to practice a skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read aloud with a partner</td>
<td>that the class has recently learned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedures

Early in January of 2005, I began requesting permission of area classroom teachers to visit their respective classroom as I was interested in finding a potential research site. After visiting several schools in three different districts, a recommendation to visit Mrs. Katola’s classroom was suggested by multiple colleagues, parents, and friends. Through a mutual friend, we were introduced. I observed her classroom on four
separate occasions with each visit lasting approximately one hour. After four visits, I approached her about allowing me in her classroom for a long-term study. We discussed our philosophies of teaching, what would be involved in the research, and how the research would be conducted. At that time, Mrs. Katola verbally agreed to participate in this research. After IRB approval, she signed a consent form (Appendix C) officially agreeing to the study as presented. On August 11, 2005, I sent a letter (Appendix D) to the Director of Curriculum and Instruction of the school district, requesting permission to conduct research at Arbor Mist Elementary School. In response, she offered to meet with me to discuss the nature of the study, the research questions, and the length of the project. A week later, I received a letter to confirm that I would have the support of the school district to conduct my research project (Appendix E).

In August 2005, Arbor Mist School hosted an open house for parents. During that time, the parents were encouraged to bring their children to school to meet the teacher and drop off school supplies. This allowed Mrs. Katola a chance to meet each child and his/her parents and permitted the parents the opportunity to meet the teacher. It also allowed the parents the opportunity to sign necessary school documents, such as emergency release forms or field trip permission slips. In addition, parents/guardians had the opportunity to indicate the parent involvement activities in which they would like to participate. The evening also provided the children a chance to find their classroom, interact with their future classmates, and meet their new teacher.

Mrs. Katola asked me if I would like to attend the event as well. I agreed, as it was an opportunity to meet both parents and children, but more importantly, to see how Mrs. Katola interacted with the families. I was hoping to have final approval from The
Ohio State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) so that I could elicit parental permission signatures for my research; however, my research protocol was not approved until several days later. Therefore, during this first and brief meeting with parents and children, I just introduced myself and tried to get to know the parents. Mrs. Katola explained that I would be in the classroom often during the school year. We both thought it important for me to have a presence in the classroom from the beginning.

Early September 2005, I sent a flyer (Appendix F) to parents/guardians inviting them to attend an information meeting. At this meeting, I explained my research using a power-point presentation (Appendix G) that described the study and requested that each sign a permission form to allow his/her child to participate in my study. Unfortunately, only two parents (representing two families) attended the information meeting. Both were inquisitive and affirmative in allowing their respective child to be a part of my research. For every household that did not attend the meeting, I sent home a letter (Appendix H) explaining who I was, what I would be researching, and requesting that each sign a consent form and return it to the school. Subsequently, a parent/guardian of every child signed a release form for his/her child to participate in the study.

Following the receipt of parental consent, I met with the children in the classroom to describe the study and answer any questions they had about the study. To conduct the meeting, I used the script outline for classroom meeting (Appendix I). Generally, this explained the various ways that I planned to collect data and shared how often I would be in the classroom. After the children had a chance to ask questions and to discuss the study, each child completed a consent form (Appendix J). The form allowed each child to check the parts of the study in which he/she was agreeing to participate. For example, a
child could check that he/she would participate by allowing a video recording to be made of his/her time at the art center, but would not allow me to take pictures of his/her work. In both the meeting with the parents and the meeting with the children, I clearly stated that at any time during the course of data collection, a child or a parent could choose to drop out of the study with no negative repercussions. After I discussed the study with the class, all of the children consented to participate fully in the study.

Initially, I spent two weeks getting to know the children and learning the routines in the classroom, which can facilitate entry into the research site and build rapport (Berg, 2004). Collection of data commenced on October 6, 2005 and was collected during a 4-month period ending on January 26, 2006. Data collection of peer dialogue for a whole school year would be ideal; however, a shorter time period was chosen as Mrs. Katola preferred the study to be completed in the first two quarters of the school year. Not being able to look at the peer dialogue and how it may have changed as the children became better acquainted with each other, could be a limitation of the study. During the duration of the study, I visited the classroom 1-3 times per week with each visit lasting from one hour to one hour and thirty minutes, the total length of time for the guided reading group time for that day. As a director at a preschool, I could only make arrangements to be away from the preschool for two - three mornings each week. In total, I made 32 visits; however, I only collected data 27 times. During each visit, I made audio recordings at various literacy centers while simultaneously taking fieldnotes to capture the gestures and non-recordable movements of the children. In addition, I video recorded the art center each day that I was there, specifically, to capture the peer interactions of the children and to look at the connections between literacy and the “arts”. Initially, I planned to video
record 28 sessions; however, due to some technical difficulties, I was only able to complete 23 sessions. Near the end of the study, I interviewed each child participant using an Interview Schedule (Appendix A). Fieldnotes, recordings, and personal interviews, and individual literacy work of children were collected and photos of children working were taken. Furthermore, I interviewed Mrs. Katola mid-way through the study, which I also transcribed and analyzed. Because the study focused on the dialogue between children, multiple meetings and interviews with Mrs. Katola were not necessary.

The audiotapes and video recordings were transcribed during the summer and fall of 2006 by both the researcher and a paid transcriber. The transcriber signed a research Assistant Confidentiality Disclosure (Appendix K) to maintain the privacy of each child. Once the data were transcribed, they were formatted and inserted into Nud*ist 6 for coding. A codebook was created as codes became apparent. Patterns and themes from the data emerged and were analyzed to answer the research questions.

To answer the research questions I had to understand the experiences of the first-grade children in as detailed manner as possible. To do so I used a grounded theory model for data analysis. Ryan and Bernard (2000) describe grounded theory as “an iterative process by which the analyst becomes more and more ‘grounded’ in the data and develops increasingly richer concepts and models of how the phenomenon being studied really works” (p. 783). After collecting and transcribing conversations verbatim, I then read through each line of text, in a process called open coding. This allowed me to identify potential themes and to see patterns emerging.

As I read and reread all transcribed data, I looked at each conversation and categorized it in a way that I thought best described the interaction. “Coding serves two
distinct purposes in qualitative analysis” (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 782), and can be used as either tags or as values. Coding tags are used to mark phrases or themes, whereas coding values are used to count fixed or predetermined content. I used coding tags in this study, as I was open to what the data had to say, rather than looking for predetermined content. For example, I would read a conversation and decide if the dialogue was being used to manipulate a peer, sing a song to support a higher mental function, share information about oneself, or for another purpose. These tags were created based on emerging themes.

All transcribed dialogue was coded. Many conversational turns were coded with multiple codes. After all data were coded, I was able to run reports to analyze how, what, and when dialogue was used. This analysis led to my assertions and allowed me to support with examples the ways in which I saw/heard dialogue being used in this first-grade classroom. This method of open coding was used primarily because I wanted initially to be open to what the data was saying. By using this method, I obtained many codes, which then allowed be to analyze data by comparing, linking, and identifying relationships that may or may not have been recognized with tagged coding. Not only did this method gave a deeper analysis of the dialogue between peers, but also allowed for a broader analysis of the data as I was able to compare, contrast, and question relationships.

**Data Collection Methods**

The methods of data collection that a researcher chooses to use should be based on the research questions, as each method is a tool for unearthing certain types of information. It is vital for the researcher to look critically at the research questions and
determine which tool is best for discovering information that will lead to deeper understanding of the research questions. Data collection in this study consisted of several methods: observational fieldnotes; interviews; artifacts; and recordings – both audio and video. The following chart lists each research question and the research method I chose as a tool to gain understanding about peer dialogue in a first-grade classroom.
### Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>What Kind of Data will Answer this Question?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How does peer dialogue at literacy centers and an art center in this first-grade classroom support children’s literacy learning?</td>
<td>Observational field notes&lt;br&gt;Audiotape transcriptions&lt;br&gt;Artifact collections&lt;br&gt;Interviews with children&lt;br&gt;Video recordings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what types of peer interactions do children engage as they interact with peers at literacy centers?</td>
<td>Observational field notes&lt;br&gt;Audiotape transcriptions&lt;br&gt;Video recordings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do children create and use artifacts as psychological tools to promote their literacy learning?</td>
<td>Observational field notes&lt;br&gt;Audiotape transcriptions&lt;br&gt;Artifact collections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: Research question – method matrix

Following is a short description of each research tool and a rationale for choosing it in this study. These include observational fieldnotes, artifacts, interviews, audio recordings, and video recordings.
Observational Fieldnotes

As many researchers have demonstrated, “Going into a social situation and looking is an… important way of gathering materials about the social world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 634), so much so that “observation has been characterized as ‘the fundamental base of all research methods’ in the social and behavioral sciences” (Angrosino & Perez cited in Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 389). However, observational fieldnotes or naturalistic observations have their problems. First, even though a researcher can try to remain objective, the mere presence of an “outsider” in a social world influences the interactions of the “insiders”. Some participant–observer researchers in early childhood classrooms address this by aligning their interactions with the children as closely to those of the teacher as possible (Wells-Rowe, 1994); however, a case could be made that whenever an additional adult is in the room, the children in the study have an “outsider” in their social world, which could be an educational benefit.

Second, the descriptions and interpretations that a researcher makes are laden with his/her own subjectivities and biases. It is imperative that a researcher address his/her preconceived ideas and remain as objective as possible while both taking and interpreting fieldnotes.

During my time in the first-grade classroom, I was an outsider. As a research trying to understand the peer dialogue of children, I immersed myself in their world. Yet, because I am an adult, I had to be careful not to let the position of power that adults have over children influence the discourse. While I had to listen, observe, and become a part of the classroom, I could not take on the role of a teacher in the literacy centers. To do so would skew the results in a way that would not help answer the research questions about
peer dialogue. To avoid interfering with the peer structure of the classroom, I took what Corsaro (1985) labeled a “reactive entry strategy” (p. 10). I would respond to children if they talked to me; however, I did not initiate conversation or participate in the peer dialogue. At the onset of the study, I was upfront and honest with the children, explaining my role in the classroom. I shared with the class that I was interested in the work that they were doing at the literacy centers and explained to them that when I observed, I would not be able to answer questions about how to complete a task. As the children learned to accept me in the classroom, I did help take care of various needs, such as supplying paper at the art center or fixing the tape player; however, I did not take on the role as “teacher” to manage behavior or answer questions about various tasks.

My presence in the literacy centers had the power to change the dynamics of the conversation among the children, at least in the beginning. As a researcher studying the role of peer dialogue, I had to listen and observe, rather than talk and take part in the conversation. Each word that I spoke could spin the conversation from peer-to-peer dialogue to adult-to-child dialogue. Even though my discourse might have been able to add meaning or depth to how a child understood a topic, the power relationship of an adult interacting with a child was not the focus of my study. As I became a presence in the classroom, the children paid less attention to me, allowing me to observe in a more natural setting. Even though I never became an “insider,” I did remain a quiet “outsider”/observer, who was able to collect data without influencing the peer dialogue.

**Artifacts**

Following the practices of other researchers (i.e., Dyson, 1993; Wells-Rowe, 1994), I collected artifacts such as written journals, worksheets, paintings, artistic
creations, or photos of constructed material that supported the meaning of dialogue between peers during this study. I digitally photographed and stored original work in an electronic data retrieval system. Occasionally, I collected original work, but only if it was voluntarily given to me or if it did not interfere with the child’s schoolwork. Hodder (2000) tells us that documents-or artifacts- distinguished from more formal records are prepared for “personal rather than official reasons” (p. 703). Even though, historically, written texts are believed to provide a “truer” indication of meaning than other types of evidence (Hodder, 2000), researchers need to look at both the artifact and listen to the dialogue to gain greater understanding of the interaction.

Many times, the document can become the other voice in the dialogue as the child talks while he/she writes, draws, or paints, making it important to look at not only the spoken words the child produces, but also the other representations, such as writings and painting that the child creates. By considering both the dialogue and the document as a co-created tool for meaning, one can a gain deeper understanding of how literacy develops through dialogue.

The addition of concrete representations of ideas and thoughts were useful in the analysis of data. As Hodder (2000) states, “material traces of behavior give an important and different insight from that provided by any number of questionnaires” (p. 705). Analyzing what children create as well as what they talk about gives greater understanding to how literacy is developed. However, material culture must be interpreted in the context in which it was created, as the dialogue, along with the artifact, allows for deeper analysis and interpretation of literacy development. With this in mind, I
analyzed artifacts and interpreted them in the dialogue context in which they were created.

Interviews

“The open-ended interview . . . offers the opportunity for an authentic gaze into the soul of another” (Silverman, 2000, p. 822). This quote reminds us that many researchers assume that interview responses indicate some external reality and that if we ask a question we will get a true response. Then, by analyzing multiple respondents’ answers to the same question, we can understand the reality of the phenomenon. An important question for researchers to consider is do data collected from interviews really help address my research topic?

In this study of how peer dialogue supports the construction of literacy knowledge in first-grade classrooms during literacy center time, one can argue that field observations and audiotapes alone could tell the story about peer dialogue in literacy centers, thus negating the need to ask children their thoughts about literacy centers. On one level, I can agree, children’s words and actions express their ideas about literacy centers and answer the questions that this study asks about peer dialogue. On another level, I think we do not ask children to explain, describe, or share their ideas often enough. Much research has been completed by observing the actions of children, with little discussion with them about their views on what they are doing. Just as Morrow (2002) interviewed the children about what they learned at literacy centers, I, too, interviewed individual children. Individual interviews allowed each child to share his/her ideas, thoughts, and opinions about literacy centers and the interactions that take place in each literacy center.
Since there were 19 students in the selected classroom, I knew that a long interview of each child would result in a huge body of data and to keep the corpus of data at a manageable limit I developed a succinct interview schedule (Appendix A). Even though this schedule was short enough to be controllable, it was also flexible enough to be open and revealing. In addition, I took the advice of Maxwell (2005) to ask the participants “real questions,” or questions that I was really interested in. Near the end of the study, I asked each child individually to answer several questions about literacy centers. I designed the questions to capture a general understanding of what children thought about literacy centers. Besides asking the children about their general likes and dislikes of literacy centers, I was interested to know if they were cognizant of how peer interactions and dialogue supported their literacy development. I developed an interview schedule that I thought would help me to look at each of those issues. The interviews were audio taped. After all of the interviews were completed, they were transcribed and analyzed.

Audio Recordings

This study focused on the dialogue that took place between children while they were working together in literacy centers. As an observer, I can write down what children are saying; however, I am bound to miss parts of the dialogue. Usually, we can count on our memory to remember the general idea and grasp the direction that a conversation took, but ideas, words, and conversational turns can easily be missed even with extensive note taking. Since I did not want to rely on my memory of who said what, when, and to whom, I relied heavily on the audio recordings of dialogue between children. In much of the work with the preschool children in Reggio, Italy, audio recordings are made and
reviewed by the teacher and the pedagogista, to capture both the dialogue and tone of the conversations (Rinaldi, 1998). Without the use of an audio recording of what was said, I would not have been able to capture the dialogue with the same level of completeness as I was able to with the recordings.

For the above mentioned reasons, I chose to use an audio recorder as an observational tool as it created an accurate and permanent record of what was said and allowed conversations to be replayed and transcribed for accuracy. To help children get used to the equipment, prior to commencement of data collection I allowed children to talk into the recorder and then listen to their voices. Even with the use of audiotapes, some conversations were missed due to the background noise in the classroom (e.g., papers rustling and movement of materials), children sitting on or covering up the microphone with other work, and the unclear speech of first-grade children. Still, using recordings, coupled with observational fieldnotes, I gained a clearer picture of what transpired at the literacy centers. Listening, transcribing, and reading the transcripts of recorded conversations helped me gain new insights and connect the data with prior understandings in a way that I could not have done by taking fieldnotes alone.

Another important motive for audio taping was that children speak quickly and softly. I tried to carefully place the microphone close enough to the work of the children to hear the conversations without invading the space in which they were working. I then sat close by to record the body movements and gestures, and to see the tasks that the children were working on. I wanted to let the audiotape pick up the majority of the speech while I observed and recorded the significant gestures and body movements. My thoughts were that this would lead to better data collection.
In reality, when I sat close to the children, they would ask me questions, work silently, or move away from the area as the classroom environment allowed the children much freedom of movement. I found that if I wanted them to work naturally, I had to move several feet away from where they were actually working. This prevented me from hearing much of what the children were saying, but with the use of the audiotape, I was able to record most of what was said.

One of my major reasons for using audiotapes was that I wanted to capture each utterance, defined as a word or group of words that signifies a thought, (Bakhtin, 1997) and to have it remain intact. Without an audio recording, the series of turns the conversation took would be limited to those that I could capture or felt were important at the time and therefore recorded during the observation. Even with the best of intentions, an utterance may not seem significant until it has been coded and analyzed for comparison with many other seemingly inconsequential utterances.

Each day when I arrived in the classroom, I would prepare and set up the microphone at a table. After a brief introduction on how to complete a worksheet or what would be highlighted at the literacy centers that day, children would be dismissed for Buddy Reading time. This would occur during the first 10 minutes of the guided reading time, a time that I considered a part of the literacy center time. Even though it was not an actual literacy center as I previously defined a literacy center, the children had rich dialogue around literacy and I tried to capture that by observations and audio recordings. Mrs. Katola would set the timer for 10 minutes and the children would move in a synchronized dance to find their partner, pick up their individual box of books, choose a space and start reading together. Each child was assigned a partner; but many times, they
had the opportunity to choose a new partner either because one of the two partners was absent or because Mrs. Katola would ask them to choose a new partner for the day. Some of the children avoided sitting next to me, some asked to sit by the recorder, and others were agreeable when I asked them to allow me to record their Buddy Reading group. I tried to rotate to different groups for Buddy Reading, but as the year progressed, there were fewer groups from which to choose. Several children went directly to a reading group and did not have buddy reading, while others left the classroom at this time for more focused literacy instruction.

After Buddy Reading time, the children worked on an Individual Literacy Event, usually a worksheet or a weekly reader page. The dialogue at this event was recorded and analyzed in the data because it was a part of the literacy center time. It was as if each child had to participate in a literacy center that was common to the whole class. Each child could work alone on this task or with a self-selected group. Many times, there would be a group of 5-6 working together or in parallel at one table in addition to several pairs and several individuals working on this task. I would usually choose the large group to observe and record until the children started completing the assignment and moving to their assigned literacy centers for the day. At that time, I too would move to a traditional literacy center that had at least two children present.

To guide the observation schedule, I had initially planned on using a rotation chart (Appendix L). I had intended to look at each of the 4 centers being audio taped 7 times, allowing me to complete 28 sessions of observations during the first half of the year. However, in the two weeks prior to formal observations, I realized that this plan would not work as I could not count on groups of children to be at each center when I was
scheduled to observe. Due to the way children were assigned to a center, their guided reading group, and the pull-outs sessions (e.g., speech, Occupational Therapy) that some children attended, group size at each literacy center could range from 0-3. I therefore decided that I would go to whichever literacy center children were working and observe that center. If during the course of the session the children left that literacy center for their other obligations, I simply moved to another literacy center and recorded a different group of children.

Even with this flexible schedule, there were moments in the day when there was not a group of children at any center. I could look around the classroom and see lone children engaged in many literacy tasks. There might be one at the listening center, one at the art center, one at the writing center, and one still working alone on the individual literacy event for the day. However, after a short wait, groups of children did form at a literacy center and I was able to observe peer dialogue.

As the researcher, I sat close to the literacy center. When the children discussed, laughed, and worked on tasks, I took notes on the general tone, the work that they were doing, and the gestures that they made. At the end of each session, I marked each tape with the date of recording.

The original plan was to transcribe the audiotapes from the two weekly sessions during the same week they were created; however, due to time constraints, I was unable to reach this goal. Several tapes were transcribed during the school year when I made observations, but the majority of the audiotapes and all of the video recordings were transcribed during the summer of 2006. This was a limitation to the study for several reasons. First, I was unable to refine my observations methods as I was not able to
critique my observation methods until after they were complete. In addition, it did not allow Mrs. Katola to read and discuss with me the conversations the children were having in a timely manner, which would have given her the chance to rethink some of the literacy centers and the activities that she presented to the children.

All audible dialogue from each tape was transcribed verbatim with anecdotal notes from the observer added to the transcription as a side note. Even though not every word was captured, an effort was made to transcribe all conversations. All of my observations and the audiotapes contained the real names of the children in the study. When transcriptions were created, the child’s real name was used. After data were coded and were being analyzed, each child was given a pseudonym. Whenever a reference to a child, a child’s name, or a child’s words was made in the public analysis, the pseudonym was used. I created a list of pseudonyms to use and the real name of each child was changed to his/her corresponding pseudonym as I used data to support my assertions. As the researcher, I am the only one who knows the connection between the real name and the pseudonym. That data, along with the audiotapes were then stored in a locked box at the researcher’s home, transcriptions were saved electronically on the researcher’s password protected computer as well as a backup copy on an encrypted memory stick, and paper copies of the transcriptions were securely filed at the researcher’s home. All data will be saved for 10 years and then destroyed in an appropriate manner.

Video Recordings

In the early 1960s, the capabilities of affordable, moving photos that could record the realities of life started a movement known as “cinema verité” - or truth-cinema. Debate exists about the concept of “realities” because each technical decision one makes
about lighting, location, and length of the video influences the point of view that is shown and interpreted. At the same time, “the very act of observing is interpretive, for to observe is to choose a point of view” (Harper, 2000, p. 721). Amidst this debate, I chose to use video recording as a methodology to observe the interactions at the classroom art center.

The teacher assigned a small group of children to the art center each day to paint, draw, or represent knowledge from a story or piece of writing that the class had created together. I used digital video recordings each visit during the course of the study to present a visual narrative of peer dialogue among the children at the art center. I positioned the digital video camera to look down at the art center from a high shelf. A microphone hung down from the ceiling and was camouflaged in the rotating drying rack for paintings that hung over the art table. I turned on the digital video camera at the beginning of each literacy center time and recorded until either the literacy center time was over or the recording disc had reached its 60-minute capacity. I converted each digital recording to a user-friendly format and saved each day’s recording onto a CD. I made a backup of each CD and saved and stored both the original and the backup in a locked box at my house.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is an integral component of the research design and should be thought about even before beginning to collect data; yet, with so much thought and consideration spent preparing for data collection and designing the right study, thoughts about data analysis are often overlooked. However, researchers need to learn from the mountaineer’s adage: “the experienced climber begins lunch immediately after finishing
breakfast, and continues eating lunch as long as he or she is awake, stopping briefly to eat supper” (citing Manning in Maxwell, 2005, p. 95). Likewise, I planned to commence data analysis as soon as there were data to analyze and intended to continue as long as I was working on the study, including writing memos, vignettes, and reports as I went.

Based on my limited experience with data collection and analysis, I knew how quickly data accumulates and to avoid data overload, I planned to transcribe, code, and store data as quickly as possible after my observations. Indeed, I was able to transcribe some of the audio recordings beginning in the fall of 2005; however, it was not until the summer of 2006 that the majority of the data were transcribed. Transcriptions of the data were formatted into a text file and inserted into Nud*ist 6. Coding began in January, 2007. After the data were coded, reports for each code were printed. Next, I analyzed each code and created memos and vignettes, since “memos not only capture your analytic thinking . . . but also facilitate such thinking, stimulating analytic insights” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 96).

The next step was to organize my thoughts and ideas. To do this, I created a matrix with the research questions along the vertical axis and codes along the horizontal axis. I was then able to determine which codes would help focus my thoughts and ideas about each question. In addition, I produced tools to help me think about specific questions. For example, for question one; I developed a chart about how peer dialogue supports literacy development at literacy centers. Using the English Language Arts Ohio Academic Content Standards and grade level indicator for first grade for a description of literacy development, I looked for samples of interactions between peers that supported literacy development. In addition, for question two concerning the types of peer
interaction in which children engage during literacy center time, I created a taxonomy of peer dialogue. This tool helped me to think specifically about each interaction and to analyze the types of peer interactions that took place in this particular first-grade classroom during literacy center time. For question three, I also looked for samples of how children use socially constructed tools to internalize and individually mediate meaning about literacy practices.

**Trustworthiness**

Bosk as quoted in Maxwell (2005) states, “All fieldwork done by a single field-worker invites the question, why should we believe it?” (p. 106). As a single researcher in this study, this quote led me to question the design of the study, to identify specific threats to my interpretations and explanations, and look for ways to address those threats. Validity is the foundation of a solid study, and one must be careful to make sound arguments that are capable of being defendable.

**Researcher Bias**

Being aware of one’s predispositions to and beliefs about a topic and acknowledging them upfront will allow the reader to sort out possible threats to validity and thus contributing to the study’s validity. In this research, my beliefs about the important role of talking with peers in constructing knowledge could be a possible threat to the interpretations that I make of the data. To avoid identifying and selecting only those passages that supported my ideas, I transcribed every audiotape and coded every part of the transcription, as I did not want to miss what the data had to share.
Respondent Validation

Usually, respondent validation or “member checks” is a process of systematically soliciting feedback about your data and conclusion from the people you are studying” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 111); however, since I worked with first-grade children, this type of member check was not possible. As an alternative, I solicited respondent validation by using interview questions. By asking the children if they preferred working together or alone and what they learned when the worked together, I embraced their perspective as part of the data. Even though I knew that the participants’ feedback could be misleading, it was still a technique to respond to threats to the validity of the research. In addition, I engaged the teacher, Mrs. Katola, in several conversations about what I was seeing in the classroom. She and I had one formal interview and several informal conversations about what I was seeing at the literacy centers. She also had the opportunity to read this report as it was in progress.

Long-Term Involvement

Another method to validate a study is long-term involvement. In Ed Young’s (1992) picture book, Seven Blind Mice, each mouse studied a different aspect of the same unknown object and reported to the group about what that object was. Each mouse had only a brief time with the object and each experienced only one attribute of the whole. As each mouse reported to the group, each had a different idea about the “strange Something.” One claimed it was a snake, another a fan. Only when the whole was revealed did they know it was an elephant. It is important that the length of involvement in a study provide the researcher enough time to collect both detailed and varied data that
will present a whole picture of the topic. Quoting the moral of the mouse tale, “knowing in part may make a fine tale, but wisdom comes from seeing the whole” (Young, 1992, p. 30). Even though this study only spanned four months of the school year, the length of time spent in the classroom over time allowed me to collect multiple and varied data from each literacy center.

Triangulation

As I make assertions and claims about the data, I will add validity to the study through triangulation, or examining a conclusion from more than one vantage point. Triangulation can involve the use of multiple methods, multiple theoretical perspectives, multiple data sources, and multiple investigators and as a strategy can add rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In this study, I used multiple methodologies to collect data such as interviews, observational fieldnotes, video and audio recordings, and artifacts. I used all of these data to support my assertions. Also, I grounded my ideas and claims in existing theoretical frameworks.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study have many of the same restrictive characteristics that are indicative of qualitative research studies in general. The size of the population, the unique situation of the subjects and their environment, the research design, the skills of the researcher, and the experience of the teacher all limit the generalizability of the research.

The investigation was conducted in a small (population about 16,000), average income (median household income $30,000), heterogeneous community (96.1% White Non-Hispanic) with very little racial and cultural diversity. The unique setting of this
study limits the generalizability of the findings to other situations because of the
difficulty of finding similar sites with the same circumstances to replicate the study.
However, this research can help to build theory about the role of peer dialogue in helping
children develop literacy skills.

The lack of diversity in the population of the study is of concern to me. Knowing
that each child brings a “fund of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992) that makes the setting
unique, I must question whether the dialogue would be different if the children came
from more diverse backgrounds.

In addition, the research took place in one first-grade classroom with 19 children
and a veteran teacher with 24 years of experience. Her knowledge, skills, and disposition
to literacy centers were different than those of a less experienced teacher, which could
influence the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, her choices of activities to use
in a literacy center were based on years of experience and knowledge of first-graders.
This particular teacher’s experience in the classroom played an important role in the
dialogue transpiring between children, as it brought strength to the learning environment
and enriched the literacy centers. We cannot be certain of what types of peer dialogue
would have transpired in a classroom if the learning centers resembled quiet “seat work”
as is sometimes the case in the classrooms of less-experienced teachers.

The length of the study poses another limitation. Even though I was in the
classroom for 16 weeks, I made all of my observations during the first half of the school
year, limiting the findings to the time of the year when the classroom community was
being developed. We cannot be certain how the dialogue might have been different if the
children knew each other better.
Also, since I was not able to record all conversations between peers, I only captured a snapshot of the exchange of ideas that took place in the classroom. Even though I used a digital video camcorder and an audio tape recorder to record the dialogue and actions of the children, I could not capture all conversations.

This study was also limited by the fact that it was not possible to give equal time to observing each literacy center. At first, I tried to use a rotation chart (Appendix K) so as to give equal time to each literacy center. However, I abandoned this idea quickly, as there were many times when the children were not at the center when the audio recorder was scheduled to record. This was due to the nature of the rotation schedule that the children followed. To capture the conversations and rich dialogue at the literacy centers, I instituted a “move the recorder as necessary” approach to the rotation.

As I was observing, I tried to be purposeful about recording both conversations and body movements of the children at various literacy centers. Even this was limiting, as I could only capture so much. Furthermore, I only observed a short portion of the day. The children’s work at the literacy centers built on the literacy skills that were modeled and explicitly taught at other times during the day. We cannot be certain of what additional data may have been revealed if I were privy to the mini-lessons, shared readings, and interactive writing that took place during the rest of the class period.

Each of the above limitations poses an interesting question. Even though they cannot be compensated for in this study, they may inspire other studies that will build on this research.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Step into this first-grade classroom and listen to the dialogue as peers interact at literacy centers…

David reads in high-pitched voice: “I like fish said the seal and this is the way I catch them.”

Steve replies: “I like seals.”

David reads in a low, slow voice: “We like fish said the lobsters and this is the way we catch them.”

Steve laughs.

(January 11, 2006)

***

Cassie: “I’m gonna read Snowman at Night or Aunty Clause or surprise you?

Okay, who wants… Notice anything funny? Anything funny? Does it look like they’re moving at night? I thought it was funny. Pick one.”

Beth: nods to indicate that she would like Snowman at Night.

Cassie: “Yeah. Snowman at Night. SIT DOWN.” She turns the pages to look for the beginning.
Cassie reads: “One year, day, one windy day I made a snowman very round and tall. The next day when I saw him he was not the same at all. I think, I think snowman starts to slide when it gets really dark. Oh the ground, down and down, the stars light into the park.”

Cassie asks: “What do you think is funny on this page?”

Beth: “That they’re drinking coffee and they’re having a … [unintelligible] and They have to … [unintelligible].”

(December 5, 2005)

***

Tina claps “Yeah, my turkey’s done.”

She holds it up for Zachary to see. Then playfully, she puts it near his face.

Tina: “Bac, bac, bac, bac.”

(November 9, 2005)

***

Anna: “How about if we just spell words?”

Tina: “Okay, ready.”

Beth: “What’s my next word?”

Anna: “The next word is uhm... What is that?”

Tina: “make.”

Anna: “make.”

(December 1, 2005)
… You are hearing the sounds of a language-rich early childhood environment – an environment that allows children to choose activities, discuss their ideas, and work together with peers. Not only is this first-grade classroom filled with authentic print, including quality children’s literature, interactive writing samples, and student produced work, it is filled with the sounds of children engaged in dialogue, as they are free to read aloud, discuss, sing, play, and interact with one another and with materials during literacy center time. It is truly a language-rich environment (Justice, 2004) that overflows with both print and oral language.

This type of environment allows the official world of school (Dyson, 1993), to intersect with the unofficial social worlds of children. It is this intersection of the official world of school, with its standards, skill instruction, and traditional activities, and the unofficial social world of peer culture that captured my interest. As Dyson (1997) states, it “is the unofficial world of childhood… (where) children declare themselves as members of the society of children” (p. 29). In this first-grade classroom, the children had about 60 minutes each morning in which these two worlds intersected. The children would gather together at circle time, and Mrs. Katola would share a mini-lesson or directions concerning the daily worksheet and the expectation of each literacy center. Then children would spend time Buddy Reading, working either alone or with friends on a worksheet, and then go to their assigned literacy center. Each child would work at that one literacy center for the rest of the hour, except for the time that he/she was called to the reading table for a guided reading lesson. It was the verbal interactions that occurred when the two social worlds of the children in this class intersected that intrigued me. See Figure 4.1 (Official and Unofficial Social Worlds of Children)
My intrigue with the dialogue and exchanges between children while at literacy centers lead to my first question, “how does the peer dialogue at literacy centers and an art center in one first-grade classroom support children’s literacy learning?” To support the analysis of the dialogue for literacy learning, I questioned the types of interactions in which children were engaging? In addition, I wondered how children created and used socially constructed artifacts as psychological tools to internalize and individually mediate meaning about literacy practices. These questions led the research and analysis of the peer interactions that took place in the first-grade classroom that I observed.
In the opening part of this chapter, I will take a close look at the environment and its supporting role in allowing this intersection of the two social worlds of children. This classroom setting provided children with opportunities to talk, play, and choose literacy events that supported the learning of literacy within a peer culture. The chance for children to work together at literacy centers without the constant proximity of a teacher allowed for many peer interactions and for the development of a strong unofficial social world embedded in the official social world of school. In an analysis of the dialogue I will explore how children’s engagement in language acts (Lindfors, 1999), those individual conversational turns that allow a child to notice, wonder, seek, and create meaning as they dialogue with others, supports the acquisition of the first-grade indicators as described in the Ohio Academic Content Standards. Even though the Content Standards are a compilation of static, decontextualized, and discrete skills, they are also a highly utilized set of indicators of literacy success in our current educational and political system. For this reason, they will be the framework used to identify literacy learning in this initial analysis of the study.

Next, I will also look at literacy events to explore how children create meaning through dialogue with peers in the unofficial social world. As discussed in chapter two, literacy is more than reading and writing but is also ways of constructing and creating meaning with written language (McLane & McNamee, 1990). Literacy is both a cognitive ability and a way of creating and interpreting meaning using verbal and visual symbols. Drawing from the New Literacy Studies (NLS) and Street’s (1995) work in which he describes both “autonomous literacy” – literacy as a set of skills - and “ideological literacy” – literacy as connected with cultural and social practices in the
world (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005), I will analyze the ways in which children’s dialogue
demonstrates learning of Ohio Academic Content Standards (autonomous literacy) and
ways in which children strive to create meaning from text so as to connect with the
cultural and social practices of the peer world (ideological literacy). This merging of the
official school world of content standards with the peer dialogue of the unofficial peer
culture is an interesting exploration of how the two social worlds can work together to
enrich a child’s learning of literacy.

The second part of this chapter will move beyond the skills that children acquire
when they interact with each other and will look at the types of dialogue children use to
create meaning and to “declare themselves as a member of a society” (Dyson, 1997,
p. 29). The types of language, or categories in which children use language, though
reflective of other researcher’s ideas, including Halliday’s functions of language, will be
viewed through a lens of how dialogue supports the emergence of a peer culture or
unofficial social world. Throughout the chapter, a continuous conversation about the role
of socially constructed psychological tools will be interspersed. The chapter will end with
a discussion on the children’s comments and perspectives of literacy centers.

**Language-Rich Environment**

A classroom can be filled with print, have a plethora of books, and contain a
surplus of literacy activities and yet, the teacher might ask the children to work in silence
as he/she believes that when children talk they are not learning (Mercer, 1995). However,
this study, based on observing the interactions between peers within a classroom filled
with literacy activities expands the characteristics of a language-rich environment to
include verbal interactions. For many years, educators have known the importance of

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print-rich- (Schickendanz, 1986), literacy-rich (Morrow, 1985) and language-rich environments (Justice, 2004). On occasion, verbal interactions have been included as part of the definition in a language-rich environment; however, those verbal interactions have been characterized as high-quality, intentional verbal input between the adult and child (Justice, 2004). In this study I focus on the verbal interactions that children engage in with peers and define a language-rich environment as a setting filled with multiple and varied verbal interactions, as well as print and manipulatives that allow for literacy practices between peers who are free to talk, play, sing, and discuss with one another, as well as listen in on peripheral dialogues while working at various tasks. Situated in a print-rich or literacy-rich environment, this language-rich, or “talk-rich” (Kalmar, 2008, p. 91) environment moves beyond a classroom filled with print and allows for deeper understanding of literacy concepts, as the interactions between peers and with materials mediate learning. In addition, it not only includes those interactions that take place within a conversation but also those extraneous verbal interactions one may overhear.

Roskos and Neuman (2001) provide a synthesis of studies that look at the impact of the environment in early childhood classrooms and provide several design principles for a literacy environment including space and literacy materials. They cite several studies that demonstrate the importance of displaying print and having access to books in a classroom, but state that the interaction among people is what produces the opportunities for learning. This was demonstrated in a study in which they designed a dramatic play setting featuring a literacy-related play office in eight Head Start classrooms. Each classroom was assigned to one of the following three conditions; a) adult engagement in the office play, b) adult observation in the office play, and c) no
adult interaction in the area. In the settings with adult interactions, the vocabulary of the children significantly improved as the setting gave parents and children occasions for using literacy. The role of a more knowledgeable other supported the child by exposure to literate behaviors that the child then took on as his/her own.

In the opening examples of this chapter, we heard children reading and laughing about text together. A closer look at the exchange between Cassie and Beth shows how their interaction supported and mediated their literacy learning.

Cassie: “I’m gonna read Snowman at Night or Aunty Clause or surprise you? Okay, who wants … Notice anything funny? Anything funny? Does it look like they’re moving at night? I thought it was funny. Pick one.”

Beth: Nods to indicate that she would like Snowman at Night.

Cassie: “Yeah. Snowman at Night. SIT DOWN.” She turns the pages to look for the beginning.

Cassie reads: “One year, day, one windy day I made a snowman very round and tall. The next day when I saw him he was not the same at all. I think, I think snowman starts to slide when it gets really dark. Oh the ground, down and down, the stars light into the park.”

Cassie asks: “What do you think is funny on this page?’ [Holds page for Beth to see.]

Beth: “That they’re drinking coffee and they’re having a … [unintelligible] and they have to … [unintelligible].”

(December 5, 2005)
Cassie and Beth’s dialogue occurred at the book nook literacy center over which book to read. Cassie provided Beth with several options and Beth, by a nod of the head, chose a classroom favorite, *Snowmen at Night* (Buehner & Buehner, 2004). Cassie took on the role of teacher, and asked questions before and during her reading to mediate both her own and Beth’s comprehension of the text. In addition, she practiced reading skills with semi-fluency and provided an opportunity for both her and her peer to gain concepts about print as they used the illustrations from the text to create meaning and make predictions about the plot. Moreover, Cassie and Beth played with the role of teacher and student in a classroom. The peer dialogue of the two girls mediated their literacy skills of reading, asking questions, and looking for details in pictures. This language-rich environment allowed them to talk and play at various literacy tasks in a print-rich environment. In the merging of the unofficial world of peers engaged in dialogue, literacy learning of the official school world rose.

Another important component in this language-rich environment is that children were given much autonomy over the choice of activities at the literacy centers. Usually, there would be one assigned task at each literacy center for the day, and after the children finished their designated task, they were expected to choose another activity at that same center from a myriad of literacy options.

Children were free to choose from numerous activities at their assigned center and usually they chose literacy activities to occupy their time rather than wandering aimlessly about the room. At the literacy center named word zone, children were typically assigned a task of writing spelling words, using magnetic letters to create words, or finding rhyming words. After the assigned task was completed, the children were free to engage
with other materials at that center to explore literacy, specifically letters and words. In this typical example, Anna, Tina, and Beth had completed the assigned task at the word zone center and were free to choose another literacy task. They chose to practice spelling their spelling words.

Anna: “How about if we just spell words?”

Tina: “Okay, ready.”

Beth: “What’s my next word?”

Anna: “The next word is uhm... What is that?”

Tina: “make.”

Anna: “make.”

(December 1, 2005)

In the freedom to choose an activity, Anna, Tina, and Beth created a literacy event that allowed an opportunity for both the giver and receivers of the spelling words to benefit from the practice of the activity. Anna had a chance to learn to read a new word by leaning on her peers, and the receivers of the words were getting practice in writing known words in an authentic, self-selected task.

When children choose activities, it can allow them to feel in control of the situation, take ownership of, and construct their own learning. Conversely, Kohn (1993) goes even further to state that when children feel a loss of control in an educational situation, it can act as an anti-motivating factor in the classroom. When children are allowed to choose their own activities, the reward can be inward delight of their own learning. In the following dialogue, we see where Tina was so delighted with herself after completing a task, that she claps her hands and verbally acknowledges her
accomplishment. Not only does she demonstrate joy in finishing her drawing of the
turkey, but she shares her success with Zachary and then plays with the finished product.

Tina claps “Yeah, my turkey’s done.”

She holds it up for Zachary to see then playfully, she puts it in his face.

Tina: “Bac, bac, bac, bac.”

(November 9, 2005)

Tina’s exclamation of delight is just one of many in this language-rich
environment where children were allowed to choose literacy activities. Other children
also show delight in completing self-selected tasks, as when Anna exclaims “Look at
that. Don’t that look pretty?” or Zachary declares, “I’m done – ta da!”. (December 1,
2005) The children also made comments on the accomplishments of their peers as seen in
the following interaction.

David: “You’re a really good drawler”

Steve: “Thanks. Yeah, and my writing. You got to see my drawing and writing
journal. You ought to see it.”

David: “I am really good at drawing pictures.”

Steve: “You know what? After we’re done with this stuff get my journal
and look at one of my pictures, okay?”

(January 11, 2006)

Children in first grade are typically 6-7 years of age and are just entering the
fourth stage of development as outlined in Erickson’s psychosocial theory: industry vs.
inferiority. Briefly defined, this is the time in a child’s life when he/she either feels
competent and productive in gaining new skills or begins to feel inferior and incapable of
doing anything well (Erickson, 1997). When children have an opportunity to work in an environment with self-selected materials, not only can they choose tasks, but they have the opportunity to create and complete tasks that are developmentally appropriate for them, as well. When children can work to their potential in a safe environment, they have an opportunity to delight in their accomplishments and share their areas of competence with their peers. In such an environment, children not only have a chance to practice their literacy skills, but also develop social/emotional skills of industry. They begin to feel competent and productive: life-long skills that will serve them well.

In addition to the direct verbal interactions in which children participate, they are active listeners or eavesdroppers to the peripheral sounds around them: (Akhtar, Jipson, & Callanan, 2001; Justice, 2004) hearing, reflecting, and responding to conversations and activities other than those in which they are primarily engaged. Akhtar, Jipson, and Callanan (2001) cite Forrester (1992), in his argument that children in all cultures rely on the overhearing context in acquiring language and other social-cognitive skills. Not only do children grasp the overheard dialogue on what Vygotsky (1978) calls an “interpsychological plane” – a level that is open for all who can hear but they also absorb the information on an intrapsychological plane, allowing it to become a part of their understanding about a topic. This leads to an outward response or a verbal testimony of knowing information.

The exchange does not need to be lengthy to demonstrate that children are actively listening to the outer dialogue in a language-rich environment. In the following example, one could easily miss the importance of just two spoken words if one is unaware of the importance of a verbal dialogue in a language-rich environment. Mrs.
Katola is teaching the long i sound at the reading table with a small group of children. She says the word, “dime” and the children respond with a word that has a similar long i sound. Zachary, who is at a nearby table coloring a worksheet, listens to the reading group practice saying various words with a long i sound that rhyme with dime. As if he is a part of the group, he quietly responds, “dime, mine.” (December 5, 2005) Even though the dialogue is short and Zachary’s response is made to an interaction that takes place on the peripheral, his response highlights the connections children make as they listen and react in a language-rich environment.

Another benefit of being an active listener of overheard dialogue is that the conversation can intrigue children to learn new concepts as seen in the following example, Mrs. Katola is working with a small group of children at the reading table while Tabitha and Erin, in close proximity, are working side by side illustrating a poem. The two girls can hear Mrs. Katola and the reading group work on the concept of onsets.

Tabitha: “I wonder if she will teach us the onset?”
Erin: “What?”
Tabitha: “I wonder if she will teach us the onset?”
Erin: “What’s that?”
Tabitha: “I don’t know, I just heard her talking about it with that group.”

(October 19, 2005)

Even though Tabitha could not explain the concept of onsets, her curiosity was peaked. As seen here, in a language-rich environment, children listen, discuss, and interact with conversations other than the one in which they are primarily involved. This proactive listening to others’ dialogue supports and motivates a child’s literacy learning.
One who has not experienced a language-rich environment may question whether children stay focused, while allowed freedom to move, talk, sing, and play. However, since choice-making has been shown to improve the academic performance of students (Morgan, 2006), I propose that when children are given an opportunity to work for prolonged periods of time on self-selected tasks, they remain engaged with the task for longer periods of time. They are not compelled to complete an assigned activity so that they can rush to the next activity, but rather stay focused on tasks that they have chosen. This affords them the opportunity to engage deeply with the task at hand. Children who interact with peers in a self-selected task may stay attentive longer and connect with the activity more intensely. Even when the discussion between peers shifts from the task at hand, it is brief and can be brought back to the task with the support of peers. In the following example, a small group of children are involved in completing a worksheet on nouns. They have been instructed to cut out pictures of various objects, decide whether the object is a person, a place, or a thing, and then glue the object in the correctly labeled column. As the children work on the task, they ask each other about the different objects and discuss the various types of nouns.

Erin: “I know what this says, bedroom. Bedroom is a place.”

Unknown Child 1: “This one. What does this say?”

Unknown Child 2: “Outside. That’s a place, isn’t it?”

Unknown Child 1: “Yep.”

Unknown Child 2: “Spoon is a thing.”

Erin: “We’re getting another puppy maybe.”

Unknown Child 1: “You are?”
Erin: “Yeah, and we’re going to name it Marshmallow because it’s white.”

Unknown Child 1: “You already have two.”

Unknown Child 2: “I like the name of Marshmallow”

Erin: “Yeah, but we haven’t got it yet. We might get it. I don’t know for sure.”

Unknown Child 1: “I have one on each thing”

Erin: “I have two on place and thing.”

Erin: “Door, door is a thing, right?”

Maggie: “Yes, that’s what I have.”

Erin: “Is this door?”

Maggie: “Door.”

Erin: “It’s a thing.”

(January 19, 2006)

At one point, Erin is reminded of the possibility of getting a new puppy and she feels free to discuss this with the others at the group and states, “We’re getting another puppy maybe.” The children discuss the name of the new puppy and the number of dogs that Erin already has and then as if they have not even veered from their task, the first unknown child states, “I have one on each thing.” Erin responds appropriately by sharing “I have two on place and thing.” As seen in this example, when the children were working on a task and one child ventured off to discuss a real life situation, it was another peer who helped return the two back to the task. As the children were working together on a task, one was reminded of the puppy she might get. Even though the dialogue about the puppy is seemingly off-task, the exchange was short and quickly returned to the task with the support of a peer. After engaging in just six conversational turns about the
puppy, a peer brings the task full circle and in a matter of seconds, the children move from an official task, to a personal conversation, and back to an official school task seamlessly. A classroom filled with opportunities to talk and interact while engaged in school work does not seem to distract children’s behavior, but rather allows them to support each other in their literacy learning.

A language-rich environment is created when children can mediate literacy learning as they interact with materials and engage other children in dialogue at literacy centers. In addition, providing an opportunity to choose from a variety of literacy activities gives a child freedom to engage in self-selected literacy events. As children engage in and complete self-selected tasks, they delight in their accomplishments, which develop social/emotional competence and feelings of industry (Erickson, 1997). Moreover, children hear and engage in secondary interactions, causing them to question and practice literacy learning. An environment filled with peer talk, especially during literacy center time, is important for children as they socially construct literacy.

**Literacy Skills in a First-Grade Classroom**

When one watches an ice-skater gracefully move almost in one with the music or listens to an opera vocalist sing a story that brings us to tears, we understand that there are multiple ways of sharing thoughts, ideas and creating meaning, or as Malaguzzi (1998) metaphorically claims, there are a hundred languages – a language being a way to create meaning. Cecil and Lauritzen (1994) quote Isadora Duncan, a world renowned dancer as having said; “If I could tell you what I mean, there would be no point in dancing!” (p. 108). Language is a tool for creating meaning. Language is more than the ability to read, write, listen, and talk. As discussed in chapter two, reading and writing is
about creating meaning; however, there are many skills that a person needs to have in order to read and write. In our educational history, educators have fluctuated back and forth on the need for skill driven education versus a pedagogy that focuses on meaning making (Pressley, 2006). Before the graceful ice-skater could command the ice with sit-spins and figure eights, some basic skating skills were needed. Hours of practice were spent perfecting each move, training the body to respond in ways that could share meaning with others. However, he/she was a skater long before he/she had mastered all of the skills for the graceful performance. When learning to read and write, skills are needed and they must be practiced, however, children are literate in many ways before they have the actual skills of coding and decoding. These skills are what this study considers under the realm of the official social world of school (Dyson, 1993).

Unfortunately, some educators forget that the skills are the means to the end, not the end. Reading and writing is more than decoding print, but is about creating meaning. Children are in the habit of creating meaning, so even when they are practicing skills, they are striving for meaning. In this part of the analysis of the study, the Ohio Academic Content Standards provide a framework for looking at the skills children are learning and practicing while engaged in peer dialogue at literacy centers.

In 2001, the Content Standards were finalized and adopted as a guide for the teaching of English in the state of Ohio. Based on a mega-analysis of reading research by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), a Congress-appointed National Reading Panel (NRP) looked at quantitative studies to determine the skills and practices necessary for learning to read and write. The NICHD analysis focused on the skills surrounding the alphabetic principle, including phonemic awareness and
phonics instruction, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary instruction. The Ohio Department of Education (ODE, 2001) used studies of the reading and writing processes in combination with the report from the NRP to create the Ohio Academic Content Standards for English Language Arts (ELA). The 10 broad standards that make up that document are as follows:

- Phonemic Awareness, Word Recognition and Fluency Standard
- Acquisition of Vocabulary Standard
- Reading Applications: Informational, Technical and Persuasive Text Standard
- Reading Applications: Literary Text Standard
- Writing Process Standard
- Writing Applications Standard
- Writing Conventions Standard
- Research Standard
- Communication: Oral and Visual Standard (ODE, 2001)

Each standard is then divided into levels (K-3rd grade, 4-7th grade, 8-10th grade, and 11-12th grade) with benchmark literacy skills specifically targeted to be mastered by the end of each level or benchmark year. To support a child’s mastery of the skill level at each benchmark, grade level indicators, or statements of knowledge that act as a checkpoint to monitor progress as the child approaches the benchmark, have been written
for each grade level. In first grade, there are a total of 79 indicators in English Language Arts. For a complete listing of the first-grade indicators, see Appendix B.

In the following sections, each standard will be summarized along with a description of the first-grade indicators. Using data collected from the study, peer dialogue will demonstrate how children are meeting and learning the skills associated with the Content Standards when engaged in talk at literacy centers. Even though in many cases the work is practicing decontextualized skills, children are creating meaning and internalizing socio-cultural ways of using language.

**Phonemic Awareness, Word Recognition and Fluency Standard**

A major component of this standard is phonemic awareness (PA), or the ability to identify and manipulate the individual sounds in the English language. PA is a strong predictor of how well children will learn to read (NICHD, 2000b) and is a foundational skill in understanding the alphabetic principle. As children learn to quickly identify or read the letter symbol (grapheme) and match it with the sound (phoneme), they are able to decode printed words. In addition, children need to master a core group of sight words, as many words do not follow the common decoding patterns. Recognizing and decoding printed words and building a stock of sight words are necessary for readers to gain fluency and to read with appropriate intonation. Fluent readers read texts with speed, accuracy, and proper expression (NICHD, 2000b).

Appropriate tasks or checkpoints for first-grade students to support the Phonemic Awareness, Word Recognition and Fluency Standard are listed as first-grade indicators. There are a total of 10 first-grade indicators to support this standard, which include the following: identifying and distinguishing the differences between letters, words, and
sentences; learning beginning and ending sounds in words; matching sounds to corresponding letters; decoding with letter-sound matches; knowing sight words; and reading texts fluidly with emphasis, voice, timing, and expression.

Opportunities for children to engage in self-selected literacy tasks at the various literacy centers not only allowed the children to practice many of the skills addressed in the Ohio Academic Content Standards, but also provided opportunities for them to construct new understandings with the support of more knowledgeable peers. While reading with peers, playing games, singing, and completing worksheets, peer talk demonstrated that children could meet and construct understanding of many of the ELA indicators. Both of these functions are important as they both support literacy learning. Each time a child practices or utilizes a skill or demonstrates an understanding of the skill he/she understands it better. Likewise, if a child is exposed to a new understanding on a social-plane it can begin to become a part of his/her intrapsychological plane (Vygotsky, 1978). See Appendix L for a complete listing of each ELA standard with its corresponding indicators and how each indicator was met though peer interactions.

Of special interest are several peer-interactions that demonstrate the conflict a child faces as he/she works on a mock literacy task to practice a discrete skill and his/her need to create meaning from visual symbols. Children bring their own “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al, 1992) or cultural tools and ideas into the classroom. When working on simulated literacy tasks, such as a worksheet to identify middle vowel sounds, previous experiences can support or hinder the completion of the task; however, peers can support one other by sharing ideas and augmenting each other’s understandings.
When Tina and Erin are working together to complete a worksheet, Erin’s understanding of pigs hinders her in approaching the task in the way the teacher intended. She turns to Tina for support. On this particular worksheet, the children are instructed to look at a picture and determine the vowel sound needed to create a rhyming word. The first and last letter of the rhyming word is presented beside the picture. The children’s task is to identify the middle or vowel sound of the word (Standard 1, Indicator 7).

Erin: “Do you know what that word is?”

Tina: “W, I, G, – wig, wi, wa.. A pig has a wig, wag.”

Erin: “W-wag.”

Tina: “It’s a wig.”

Erin: “No it’s not. Pigs don’t have wigs.”

Tina: “Yes.”

Erin: “Its wig. w/i/g, Yes, its wig.”

Tina: “I told you.”

Erin: “A pig had a wig. That doesn’t make sense.”

Tina: “It’s a wig.”

Erin: “No it’s not.” [She turns to me and asks: “Do pigs have wigs?”]

I shrug my shoulders.

Erin: “Zachary, will you help me?”

Zachary: “It’s wig.”

Tina: “Wig /w/ /i/ yes it’s wig.”

Erin: “No it’s not.”

Tina: “It says, /w/ /I/ /g/ wig.”
Unknown Child: “A pig has a what?”

Erin: “A pig has a wag.”

Erin: “It could be tail.”

Erin: “It could be a pig has a wet tail.”

Tina: “We got to get this.”

Erin: “Okay, I’m just going to go with wig. /w/i/g/.”

(November 3, 2005)

Even when Zachary and Tina tell Erin that the word is wig, she has a hard time believing them because a pig with a wig is not logical to her. She even states that a pig with a wig does not make sense. Rather than hearing the sound of pig/wig to complete the task of creating a rhyme, Erin is trying to make sense of the sentence, even incorporating her previous knowledge of pigs having tails to complete the task. Finally, she concedes to Tina and Zachary’s insistence that the word is ‘wig’ and decides to just go with the word ‘wig’. This vignette demonstrates the conflict that children may be confronted with when we ask them to work on decontextualized, discrete skills rather than on creating meaning from visual symbols. Even though Erin has not demonstrated understanding of the skill as evidenced by her reluctance to agree with Tina and Zachary’s insistence, she has experienced a cognitive conflict. According to Piaget, peer dialogue is productive when peers with different points of view discuss a problem. The child must “assimilate” this new information and “accommodate” it into his/her present understandings, which leads to construction of new knowledge (Piaget, 1954, p. 350). In this example, Erin and Tina had different levels of understanding, resulting in conflict for Erin. Even though she may not understand at the time of the interaction, she has begun to assimilate and
accommodate new knowledge. She is constructing knowledge with peers on a social-plane, and according to Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of learning will be mediated to an intra-psychological plane.

On the other hand, the freedom to choose tasks and to talk at the literacy centers in this first-grade classroom allowed peers to support each other in decoding strategies through dialogue while engaged in authentic reading tasks. Many children in this first-grade classroom are still in the nascent stages of mastering decoding or the ability to associate each sound that a letter makes with the letter symbol in order to read a word. When one child has a better understanding of the strategies that are used to decode, he/she can assist a less-advanced child’s skills, leading the less-advanced student to identify and blend sounds together to decode words (Standard 1, Indicator 4) as can be seen as children read a class produced book together.

In this popular classroom task, children would read the class-produced Star of the Week book located at the book nook literacy center. Each week, Mrs. Katola would choose one student to be the star of the week. The class would interview a peer to find out his/her favorite things. Then, the children would dictate a paragraph about the star of the week while Mrs. Katola, acting as a scribe, would write their words onto chart paper. The paper would be fastened to the bulletin board in the classroom along with photos of the child and his/her family. After several completed descriptions had been collected, Mrs. Katola put the pages together to create a big book, and placed the class made book at the book nook literacy center for children to read either individually or together.

One day, Cassie and Beth are reading the Star of the Week book together at the book nook literacy center when they encounter a word that they do not know. They stop
reading and go directly to Maggie to ask her about her life. Maggie does not give the girls a direct answer, but instead supports them through a decoding process.

Cassie: “Maggie Snow is the star of the week. She has four girls in her family. Amy, Maggie, Chelsea, no, Theresa and Lesley.

Beth: “Hold on. Theresa? Maggie, come here. Do you have a Theresa in your room?”

Beth: “That says Theresa?”

Maggie: “No.”

Beth: “Sound it out.”

Maggie: “It has Christ. It starts with Christ. It starts right here.”

Beth: “Would it be Christian?”

Maggie: “No, I have three sisters. Would Christian be a girl name?”

Cassie: “No”

Maggie: “Thanks. No one can figure it out?”

Cassie: “Christink?”

Maggie: “Look, what is at the end? eh like?”

Cassie: “Christina.”

Maggie: “Christina, yeah. Christina.”

Beth: “I knew that.”

Maggie: “No.”

Beth: “Because I know her from [unintelligible]”

Maggie: “Christina because it has an ‘a’ at the end”

(December 5, 2005)
Maggie had a better understanding of the strategies that are used to decode words, and was able to lead Beth and Cassie’s understanding of the text by meeting her peers at their level and supporting them so that they could decode the text. This is an example of how a more knowledgeable other can help lead the learning of a less knowledgeable other in his/her zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Maggie, the more knowledgeable other, led Beth and Cassie in not only meeting an academic standard, but by helping them to utilize strategies that will support them in developing skills that will help them to read and to create meaning from authentic text. Maggie did this by helping the girls to find a word that they knew (Christ) and then supported them to use that word to assist the decoding process. Even though reading is more than decoding symbols, it is a part of how children learn to understand the symbols and create meaning from them.

In another self-selected task, Erin and Nick are working together to identify letters (Standard 1, Indicator 1) and put the letter blocks into a framed container in alphabetical order. In many ways, their actions look and act more like play than attempting to complete a decontextualized skill. According to Garvey (1990), play is self-selected, intrinsically motivated, pleasurable, and involves active engagement. Erin and Nick have chosen this activity, are motivated to complete the task for no extrinsic rewards, are finding pleasure in the challenge, and are actively involved. As they work on this project, they lean on a socially-constructed psychological tool – the alphabet song – to provide assistance in this process.

Nick sings: “a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, q, r, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, z.”

[While he sings, he looks at the alphabet on the word wall. The team
Nick: “That’s e.”
Erin: “I found it.”
Nick: “I found u.”
Erin: “What do we need?”
Nick: “x, s, f.”
Erin: “Here is an ‘f’”

(January 12, 2006)

This kind of interaction continues as they look for various letters, discuss what letter they need, ask and answer questions about certain letter symbols, and try to put the letters in order. The alphabet song is used several times during this interchange to aid in the correct order of the letters.

As they near the end of the task, a third child shares with them that they have the letter blocks in the wrong order. I observe that the second row is not going left to right.

Third Child: “You got it wrong.”
Erin: “Oh yeah, we got it wrong.”
Erin: “Oh Nick, I am so mixed up. I’m ready to...”

[Not only did the have the second row of letters going from right to left, they had left out a letter.]

They sing the alphabet again: “a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, q, r, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, z.”

(January 12, 2006)
As they started working to rearrange the letters into the correct order, it was announced that it was time to clean up and they were not able to finish the task.

In these examples, children provide one another with letter-sound associations, model fluent reading with intonation, and assist each other to look for known words in bigger words and to stretch out the letter sounds in order to read. With freedom to play, discuss, and work together, peers are able to practice and assist each other in developing word recognition and fluency, some of the literacy skills deemed important by the Ohio Academic Content Standards (ODE, 2001). Yet, children strive to make meaning of the text by asking questions or stating facts (i.e. would Christian be a girl name? or pigs don’t have wigs) as they accomplish the task.

**Acquisition of Vocabulary Standard**

The National Reading Panel has stated that a child’s vocabulary is strongly linked to reading comprehension (NICHD, 2000b). When a child has a large vocabulary, he/she is free to focus on the meaning of text while reading, rather than concentrating on the meaning of each individual word. Many words are learned without direct and explicit teaching, but rather by overhearing a word being used (Akhtar, Jipson, & Callanan, 2001) or through social interactions with peers. When children are exposed to environments where they can dialogue, they acquire new vocabulary (ODE, 2001). To expand their lexicon, students learn to use context clues, and to ask peers and adults for direct explanations of unknown words. They learn to apply various word analysis skills to build on their own vocabulary. Indicators for vocabulary acquisition in first grade include using context clues to define unknown words, identifying synonyms and antonyms, classifying words into categories, recognizing common sight words, using homophones, predicting
the meaning of compound words with two known words, recognizing contractions, adding inflectional endings to root words, and using a beginner’s dictionary to determine the meaning of words.

Even though the Content Standards explicitly state that children learn vocabulary through interactions with others, there is not one first-grade indicator to support that activity. Yet, the data show that vocabulary acquisition is supported through peer dialogue in this first-grade classroom in many ways. For example, Anna and Tina were working together on spelling words. Anna reads Tina’s list of spelling words and instructs Tina to spell the word ‘come’. Tina knows that her spelling word is ‘came’ and points this out to Anna. In telling her to look at this word and how to read this word, she supports Anna in recognizing a common sight word by sharing with her how to say and spell the word (Standard 2, Indicator 4). Children add inflectional endings (Standard 2, Indicator 8) to words to create new words as when Zachary is using a sponge to paint and states that he is ‘sponging’. In the word zone literacy centers, two girls are working on creating words with magnetic letters. One girl spells the word ash. Her peer instructs her, “Put ash right here. You should put ash right here and then find tray, ashtray, ashtray.” She thus helps her friend create a compound word (Standard 2, Indicator 6). Peer dialogue supports children in recognizing sight words, adding inflectional endings, and creating compound words; however, much of the peer dialogue observed involves one child asking a peer for the definition of new words in order to understand the dialogue of his/her peers.

When Stacey is painting at the art table, she announces that she is going to paint a bee on the flower. Anna questions Stacey about a word she does not comprehend.
Stacey: “I got to make the bee on the flower.”

Anna: “What, you got to make DJ a flower?”

Stacey: “No, a bee.”

Anna: “You paint a ‘b’?” [She paints the letter b on her paper.]

Stacey: “No, like a bee in real life that stings you.”

(October 26, 2005)

Anna knows one definition of the letter b, but does not recognize the homophone bee, which causes confusion for her. She cannot understand why Stacey would paint the letter b on the flower. However, Stacey is able to define the word ‘bee,’ allowing Anna to gain experience with homophones (Standard 2, Indicator 5) from peer dialogue.

Not all children can explain their vocabulary as easily as Stacey. Tina and Zachary are painting at the art table and Tina comments on the condition of the water, stating that it is dirty. When Zachary elaborates on her description by using synonyms (Standard 2, Indicator 2) to explain, Tina asks for clarification. However, Zachary cannot completely explain what he means by the new word.

Tina: “This water is gross.”

Zachary: “You have the dirty water.”

Zachary: “You got the one that is slimed.”

Tina: “What do you mean slimed?”

Zachary: “One time I got that one and the green got stuck to my brush.”

(October 26, 2005)
In this interaction, Zachary uses the word ‘slimed,’ but when questioned about its meaning, he cannot explicitly define the word. Instead, he tries to explain what he means by using an example to describe the word.

Children notice new words being used by their peers. While working together at the art table, Anna uses a new word and Zachary questions her about the word.

Anna: “It’s going to be funky.”
Zachary: “Funky?”
Anna: “That’s how most trolls are.”
Zachary: “That is the first time I ever heard you say that word.”
Anna: “What, funky?”
Zachary: “Yeah.”
Anna: “I got it from Erin, and it was in a book.”

(November 9, 2006)

When Zachary comments on the word, Anna is quick to point out that she learned it from Erin and that it was in a book. She is verbally experimenting with the words that she is learning from text. One can only wonder if she and Erin were reading a book together and Erin had to explain the word, thus supporting Anna’s vocabulary learning during a shared literacy event.

An environment that allows children to interact and discuss concepts provides opportunities for them to practice their budding vocabulary. When asked to explain a word or concept, a child has to reformulate his/her ideas in a way so that he/she can explain it to others. For example, Stacey knows the word ‘bee’ and is able to explain it easily to Anna. In Zachary’s case, he can use the word slimed appropriately, but yet is not
competent in explaining his definition. Even when a child cannot easily explain the words he/she uses, I believe there is a benefit to providing a classroom environment that allows peers to ask, define, and discuss new vocabulary. An environment that provides children the opportunity to practice their new and developing vocabulary skills via peer interaction is supportive of vocabulary acquisition.


For a reader to comprehend text, he/she must actively engage with the text by intentionally thinking as he/she reads (NCHID, 2000b). Reading is a problem-solving process that requires strategies for the reader to make sense of written language and to remain engaged with text (ODE, 2001). Beginning readers must develop concepts about print, (e.g., how books work, and that print carries meaning) and develop strategies for thinking about text as they read. Strategies that are helpful in developing comprehension skills include asking questions about the text and connecting the text with one’s own experiences. Several first-grade indicators for this standard include making predictions, recalling important ideas, and asking and answering questions about text. Beth demonstrated asking questions about text when she read a story about a big pumpkin. When the story did not make sense to her, she questioned the text by asking, “Like how could he carry a biggest pumpkin with (that) little of a stem?” For anyone who has seen a little stem on a big pumpkin, this is indeed a good question.

Peer dialogue in this first-grade classroom provided opportunities for children to read together and discuss the text, developing the comprehension skills in both the reader and the listener of the text. David and Steve are reading the book *We Like Fish*. Their
discussion creates a strong bond with the text, not only enhancing their comprehension, but also creating an enjoyable reading experience.

David reads: “‘I like fish,’ said the octopus, ‘and this is the way I catch them.’”

Steve, [adding prior knowledge]: “That’s the way they catch them with their tentacles.”

David, [building on what Steve understands]: “And they suck the blood. Actually, they squeeze them.”

Steve: “Yeah and …”

David: “And wait for them to die.”

Steve: “And then they eat them.”

David mumbles: “And their head…”

Steve: “Yeah!”

David: “That’s they way they catch them.”

David reads: “‘We like fish,’ said the lobster ‘and this is the way we catch them.’”

David: “If there, if there’s…”

Steve: “They go like this. Ding cusch.”

David: “If they, if they slow ones, they slows their snap them if they don’t have it, it’s snap them and snap the fish out of it. Cuck.”

Steve: “Yeah.”

David: “Then they eat it.”

Steve: “Yeah. That’s the easy way.”

David reads: “‘I like fish,’ said the shark, ‘and this is the way that I catch
them.’”

Steve: “That was easy.”

David reads: “‘We like fish,’ said the pelicans, ‘and this is the way we catch them.’”

Steve: “They go slurrrppp and they get them.”

(January 11, 2006)

As David and Steve read and discuss the text, they demonstrate comprehension of the text by supplementing the written words with dialogue based on their prior knowledge and experiences (Standard 3, Indicator 5). Not only do they add to the text, they add to each other's understanding of the text by sharing previous knowledge as when Steve states “That’s the way they catch them with their tentacles.” David agrees with Steve and builds on his conversational turn by elaborating, “And they suck the blood. Actually, they squeeze them.” The dialogue between peers during their shared reading supports comprehension.

Discussion of a common text also allows children to build social bonds. The above dialogue was a mix of reading and narrative as each time the boys read a part of the text, they added their own narrative. Dyson (1993) states that “narratives not only communicate, but they also allow their authors to manipulate or regulate their own identities and those of others” (p. 58). It was if Steve and David were trying to secure a position of authority with each other as well as developing social cohesion as they read and added their own perspectives to the text via peer dialogue. The text provided a common experience and a “common experience … is a way in which children declared and enacted their own social bonds” (Dyson, 1993, p. 61).
In addition, one way children demonstrate comprehension of text is when they make predictions from the text, as does Steve when he points to the illustrations to tell Sarah what is going to happen next in the book (Standard 3, Indicator 4). In this vignette, Steve has just bought a book at the book fair and is delighting in sharing the pictures with Sarah. Despite the fact that Steve is not reading the text, comprehension appears to be evidenced as he observes the illustrations and shares his understanding with Sarah.

Steve: “That guy is holding him back. He’s holding back from that guy. See. He’s trying to get him away. Do you know who is going to fight him?

Who is going to fight him? Guess who is going to fight him?”

Steve: “Guess.”

Sarah: “Who?”

Steve: “The knight blue, the good guy”

(November 16, 2005)

In this language-rich environment filled with verbal dialogue, children are able to discuss, critique, and share their predictions about the text as they read together. Furthermore, they are able to add their own prior experience and knowledge to text, thus connecting to the text. The previous observations indicate that peer dialogue seems to aid the comprehension strategies for these first-graders.

Reading Applications: Informational, Technical, and Persuasive Text Standard

In addition to reading for enjoyment, reading proficiencies should also include the ability to gain information from a text, to inform decisions, and to accomplish a task. Children must experience reading materials that attempt to persuade the reader to consider a certain viewpoint or to follow directions. Texts should provide children with
occasions to analyze a text and recognize stereotypes and opportunities to use charts, graphs, and diagrams to gain information (ODE, 2001). First-grade indicators for this type of behavior include identifying the sequence of events in a text, using text features (i.e., captions and illustrations) to develop comprehension, and using simple diagrams and charts.

Children had opportunities to develop these skills in this language-rich environment while at literacy centers. Despite the limited observations of children using non-fiction text, the children did utilize skills of using text features and diagrams when reading fiction. For example, when David and Zachary are reading a fictional counting text together, David literally counts each spider in the illustration to check the reliability of the text.

Zachary: “There are 10 spiders on the spider web.”

David: “No there’s not”

Zachary: “One, two, three…”

David: “Wait, let me count.” [Counts to self] “There’s – let me count and you read.”

Zachary: “There are nine spiders in the tree.”

David: “What?”

Zachary counting softly: “One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine. Yeah, there’s nine.”

David: “Nine spiders in the tree.”

Zachary: “There are eight spiders on the sidewalk.”

David counting softly: “One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. There’s
eight. I said eight?"

Zachary: “Yeah.”

(October 6, 2005)

Zachary and David continue reading the text with this back and forth behavior of reading and checking the illustrations, thus demonstrating their ability to use illustrations to develop comprehension skills (Standard 4, Indicator 1). David has discovered that one can use the illustrations of a text to support what the print is saying. He has learned to question the text and to use the images in the text to find answers to his questions.

By providing opportunities for children to work on self-selected activities in the context of literacy centers, various strategies to support the reading process are practiced and utilized, not because it is the skill of the day, but because it is a necessary component of creating meaning while engaging in a literacy event such as reading.

Reading Applications: Literary Text Standard

Reading literary text enhances ones understanding of the human story, especially when the texts represent a variety of authors and cultures (ODE, 2001). Skills to depict settings, explain plots, describe characters, along with comparing and contrasting texts are important in understanding, analyzing, and critiquing text. Children in first grade should have opportunities to practice skills in identifying characters and events in a story, retelling the beginning, middle, and ending of a story, knowing the difference between stories, poems, and plays, and recognizing predictable patterns in stories and poems.

Mrs. Katola created literacy activities that mandated whole class participation over the span of several days. For example, Mrs. Katola read the book *Moe the Dog in Tropical Paradise* (Stanley, 1999). After the class finished the book, they discussed the
story and worked together to retell the story. Then, the whole class participated in an interactive writing lesson to write the first sentence in the retelling. When the sentence was complete, Mrs. Katola taped the sentence to a large, blank sheet of paper and put it at the art center. The small group of children assigned to the art center on that day worked together to paint an illustration to support the class written text. The next day during interactive writing time, the children worked together to continue telling the story. Not only did the students have to think about what happened at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the story, but as they added supporting details, they had to discuss if that part of the story would come before or after a detail that had previously been shared. This type of interaction with the book *Moe the Dog in Tropical Paradise* (Stanley, 1999) continued for the next 16 days. This particular event was not situated in the literacy centers, but after the interactive writing event, the children illustrated the story at the art center, which allowed for many literacy indicators to be addressed.

During the course of this activity, many first-grade indicators to support the reading application standard took place. Children had to reflect on the setting, remember the sequence of events, and describe the characters in the literacy text (Standard 5, Indicator 2 & 3). Then small groups of children, using information and pictures from the text, would work together to illustrate their interpretation of the story (Standard 5, Indicator 1). In this one, in-depth activity, children had the opportunity to use a text to complete purposeful work. In this conversation, Molly and Tina try to determine what needs to be painted in their illustration of the text.

Molly: “How am I going to do the sand?”

Tina: “What sand?”
Molly: “Stand.”

Tina: “Stand?”

Molly: “Yes, to get hot chocolate.”

Tina: “Oh.”

Molly: “To get hot chocolate.”

Tina: “I don’t know if that is supposed to be in our picture or in the next one”

Molly: “Look.” She reads while she points to the words. “They left the movies and went to get some hot chocolate.”

(January 18, 2006)

When Tina wonders if a hot chocolate stand should be included in their picture, Molly went back to the text to support her position. On another day, Steve, Cassie, and Sarah also used the text to sustain their positions and share understandings of text (Standard 5, Indicator 1).

Steve: “I think we should make more houses.”

Cassie: “Now this we have to do together. We have enough houses. Now we have to work on factories. What should we do for the first factory?”

Sarah: “They’re not going to a factory.”

Cassie: “Yes, there’s a factory. Let’s look at the book” [She goes to get the book.]

(January 12, 2006)

This class project allowed children to work together and practice literacy skills defined in the Ohio Academic Content Standards for English Language Arts while
engaging in a purposeful activity and completing a beautiful display. See Appendix M for pictures of the completed project.

**Writing Process Standard**

Writing is a process and children’s writing develops when they engage in prewriting, drafting, revising and editing, and publishing text. Children learn that there are different writing styles based on the purpose and audience of the text. Revision strategies to improve the content, organization and language of writing should be practiced (ODE, 2001).

Included in the first-grade indicators for this standard, the skills to be developed comprised of generating writing ideas through discussions with others, determining who the audience is, organizing writing to include a beginning, middle, and end, using descriptive words, and using resources such as a word wall and beginner’s dictionary to select effective vocabulary.

The children in this first-grade class had a writing workshop time everyday; however, it was before literacy center time and consequently, very few examples from the preceding indicators were observed during the peer interactions that took place at the literacy centers. Still, there were a few examples. When children were at the writing table literacy center, they were to find one of their published books and illustrate the text. In this classroom, published books were created by having a child draft, edit, revise, and rewrite a piece of writing (Standard 6, Indicator 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, & 14). After the writing process was completed, a parent volunteer transcribed the story into a small, bound book. The illustration of the text was the last part of the writing process and was discussed by peers and observed at literacy centers.

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Another indicator from this standard that was observed is using resources such as a word wall to choose a word to write. In this classroom, Mrs. Katola had a name chart, a word wall, and a list of words she called Dr. Maddie’s words. Dr. Maddie’s words consisted of a list of words that children were learning about in science or in other content. At various time, I observed children using all three of these resources to support their writing processes.

In addition, children spent time at the writing center illustrating poems (Standard 6, Indicator 14) that they were learning in class and then added the illustrated poems to their own poetry book. However, this particular group of children would take the printed poem and scribble over the words on the page. By scribbling over the words of the poem, the children had modified a task to gain control of the situation. Interestingly, almost every child had scribbled in his/her poetry book. This was something that the children had taken control of: it had become a part of the peer culture (Corsaro, 2003). To support the children in thinking about the text and creating an illustration to depict said text, Mrs. Katola went through each child’s poetry book and gave them a sad face or a smiley face, depending on if they had drawn a picture or scribbled over the words. This caused some discussion at the writing table when they were illustrating poems.

Cassie: “Do you think she (Mrs. Katola) will like picture?”

Beth: “Yep.”

Sissie: “Do you like writing center?”

Beth: “Yes.”

Cassie: “Well, at least we got an okay and not a sad face. I thought I was going to get a sad face.”

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Beth: “Me too.”

Sissie: “Some of them I just like scribbled on. But now I’m starting to draw pictures. If we don’t pictures, then I don’t think we will get to take it home at the end of the week.”

Beth: “I know. I just want a good job.”

(February 18, 2006)

When I asked children why they scribbled the poems, one responded, “Because it is cool.” Children have a whole set of guidelines that they live by that are not necessarily known by the teacher. The scribbling of the printed poems was a manifestation of this phenomenon. According to Dyson (1993), children try to achieve some sense of power and agency in the classroom which manifest itself in an unofficial classroom world. In this study, I was not privy to the unofficial world that belonged to the children, but the scribbling of the poems was a glimpse into one of the actions of the unofficial world of the children. Even when asked, they could not explain why they did this, but each child knew that it was an accepted practice.

The experiences at the writing center were designed to allow children to write notes to each other and to illustrate poems and published books. However, the unofficial world of the children overshadowed the official world, and only a small number of indicators for this standard were observed.

**Writing Applications Standard**

Various types of writing require different language, formatting, and special vocabulary (ODE, 2001). Students just beginning to write need to learn about the different reasons for which one writes and practice using different forms (e.g., letters,
notes) of writing. As children become more proficient with writing, they learn to intentionally choose vocabulary to enhance the document for the intended audience.

Writing simple stories with a beginning, middle, and end and including descriptive words and details, responding to stories with personal judgments, writing friendly letters, and informal writings (e.g. messages, notes) for various purposes are first-grade level indicators to support this standard.

Children write information down when it is important as taking pen to paper creates a lasting memory of our thoughts and actions. Children, in environments where the written word is valued, come to understand, even before they can read, that marks on a piece of paper are important. Children know that print carries meaning and that other people can share in your understanding by reading the print (McLane & McNamee, 1990, Schickendanz, 1986). During literacy center time, many children would write notes to one another, placing them in personal cubbies or handing them directly to the intended recipient. Mostly, the notes shared autographs or phone numbers, important pieces of personal information that a friend would need. In this case, Nick is writing to Tina, a child he wants to have as a friend.

Beth: “Who you writing a letter to, Nick?”

Nick: [whispers something I cannot hear]

Tabitha: “Tina?”

Nick: “I writing one to Zachary.”

Beth: “Nick, write Zachary’s first.”

Nick: “I dropped it.”

Beth: “You already wrote an s.”
Nick: “I’m going to write my phone number.”

Beth: “Like this 8, 9.”

(January 6, 2006)

Nick has chosen to create a personal note to a friend, displaying a desire to produce an informal writing piece (Standard 7, Indicator 4); however, he had a weak understanding of how to create a letter and what information to put in the letter. The wish to share his personal life with a friend initiated a need for a personal note. Through peer dialogue, his friends supported him in writing the note by telling him the information that he should include in the note, such as the name of who the note would go to. Nick’s peers also provided him with lessons in how to make numbers. During literacy center time in which children had an opportunity to choose activities, they used literacy for authentic literacy events and supported each other in being successful in those literacy events. This is just one example of notes that were created during literacy centers. Many children shared autographs, phone numbers, and personal notes that were written at this time. Many of them shared a note with a phone number on it written to me. The literacy centers provided a time for children to engage in authentic writing practices.

**Writing Conventions Standard**

With a common understanding of writing conventions, the written word becomes a very effective tool for communicating ideas and expressing oneself. Students can learn about and gain proficiency in the conventions of spelling, punctuation, and grammar through modeled experiences and opportunities to practice (ODE, 2001). First grade indicators include writing legibly, using spaces between words, spelling high frequency words and regular short vowel patterns words correctly, spelling unfamiliar words
phonetically, using end punctuation correctly, capitalizing the first word in a sentence, along with names and the pronoun I, and using nouns, verbs, and adjectives.

Through peer dialogue, children’s understandings of writing conventions were demonstrated at various literacy centers. Children were given many opportunities to spell unfamiliar words by segmenting and sounding out (Standard 8, Indicator 5). In the following examples, we see that children search for ways to create meaning even when working on “skill of the day” worksheets. This is shown through peer dialogue as they express understandings of why they are implementing the various skills. Rick and a peer talk about the word shark as they read and then write the word on a worksheet. Even though the worksheet is asking children to use the ‘sh’ digraph, it provides them with an opportunity to read and spell new words.

Rick: “a/r/k. Shark. That’s right there. I can know because a/r/k.”

Unknown girl: “It’s s-h-a-r-k.” [stretches out the word]

Rick: “I know that.”

(November 30, 2005)

We see that Rick, not content to just share the right answer, had to explain it to his peer, demonstrating that he had internalized the skill and it had become a part of his understandings about literacy.

In addition, children shared with each other about various writing conventions. In the following examples:

We see a second child offering help to the first child by explaining the convention of using spaces when you write (Standard 8, Indicator 1).

Child: “Tina.”
Tina: “What?”

Child: “Tina, I’m thinking you need to put spaces between your words because it says Cassie, not toCassie”

(November 22, 2005)

And we see children discussing neat handwriting (Standard 8, Indicator 1).

Tabitha: “Erin, Erin, I, Did I write my name neatly?”

Erin: Yeah, that’s good!”

(November 22, 2005)

Children, when given the opportunity to discuss and work together, not only make their learning visible through their dialogue, but also support each other in constructing new understandings. With the focus more on reading at the various literacy centers, writing processes, applications, and conventions seem to be of secondary concern; however, they were a part of the dialogue and work at the literacy centers in this first-grade classroom as children internalized the conventions of writing.

Research Standard

In our informational world, children need to learn to locate, select, and make use of information from a variety of sources, including: written texts; technological sources; charts; and reference materials in order to investigate answers to issues and concerns they may encounter. Research skills are used in all contents areas and should be incorporated into all instruction (ODE, 2001). Indicators for first grade include using books or observations to gather information, and using techniques to gather information from a variety of sources.
A small group of children are working on an assigned task to complete a chart highlighted in the *Weekly Reader*. The class had previously worked together to complete this same chart which sequences the life cycle of a butterfly. Now each child is to complete his/her own chart. As a small group works together and discusses the sequence of the life cycle, they become confused and use appropriate searching techniques to find the information on the class displayed chart (Standard 9, Indicator 2).

Child 1: “A butterfly becomes a …”

Child 2: “A chrysalis…”

Child 1: “You mean at the bottom?”

Child 2: “My….”


Child 2: “Okay, let me go check.” [The child goes to the class created example to research the sequence.]

(October 12, 2005)

Both children go to the chart and come back to complete the task, demonstrating an ability to research information about a topic.

**Communication: Oral and Visual Standard**

Oral and visual communication, along with written communication, is vital when expressing thoughts and ideas. Children must be provided with opportunities to deliver presentations and convey information to inform and entertain audiences. As children are exposed to good models and have opportunities for practice, they learn to control language and choose vocabulary to clarify their points. By presenting to various groups,
Children can learn to adjust their presentation according to different audiences and for different purposes (ODE, 2001).

Indicators for children in first-grade include using active listening skills, asking questions, comparing what is heard with prior experience, following simple oral directions, speaking clearly, and delivering brief presentations: to inform; to share a personal experience; and to entertain.

One group of children was to use the text, *I Bet I Can*, for Reader’s Theater. Even though text is read in this kind of presentation, the children learn to deliver simple dramatic presentations (Standard 10, Indicator 7). When practice for the reader’s theater started, children read the text through.

Maggie: “Hi, My name is Maggie Snow. And I have a couple things to say before we start the program.”

(November 17, 2005)

After reading the text several times, she reads it and adds details.

Maggie: “Hi, My name is Maggie Snow and I will say a couple things before the play starts. Well, the play is called *I Bet I Can.* I will be Mary.

Zachary: “Hi, I am Zachary and I will be the narrator.”

Tina: “Hi, I am Tina and I will be the [unintelligible].”

David: “My name is David and I will be the [unintelligible].”

Tina: “The bear tried to jump over the river. Splash went bear.”

Zachary: “I told you so.”

Tina: “I bet you can’t.”

Zachary: “Bear tried to jump over the wall. Splat went bear.”
After the children practice the lines several times, they have attracted an encouraging audience. Laughing, Anna comments, “This is the funniest!” and then instructs the cast to: “Wait, wait. Look at the camera” as she pretends to be taking their picture. This shift from school task to play changed the dynamic of the event. It went from being literacy instruction to a social skill with an authentic purpose, or as Hall (1991) states, a means to some other end. Yet, it is the practice that the children have had from reading the text several times, that allows them the ability to embellish the text in play. The addition of other players in the play scene encourages the readers to add motions and voices with the reading.

Maggie: “Hi, my name is Maggie Snow and I have a couple of things to say before the play starts. Well, I will be the narrator and I will be goooaaatttt’”

[making her voice bleat like a goat while she says the animal.]

[Not to be outdone, Zachary adds something to his next line.]

Zachary: Hi, I am Zachary Blair and will be narrator number two and the fox.”

[He spells the word fox in the air]

Tina: Hi, I am Tina Masters and will be bbbeeeaaarrrr.” [growls out the word bear]
David: “And I am David Durry and will be the kangaroo and the ox.” [he makes an ox like noise]

(November 17, 2005)

Not only do the children add flair to the introduction, they add sound effects during the reading of the text, with explanation.

Zachary: reads “Bear went into the cave and slept [snores] all winter.”

Zachary: comments “That means that he sleepy.” [laughter]

(November 17, 2005)

After completing the script, Maggie instructs the cast, “Now one, now two, now three, now four, hands-bow.” The children of both the cast and the audience laugh as the readers bow.

I was not present to see the final production when the four children would present in front of the whole class, but the use of Reader’s Theater during literacy centers provided children an opportunity to deliver simple dramatic presentations, while engaged in literacy that was embedded in play.

Summary of Peer Interaction to Support Literacy Learning

Literacy centers are a widely used instructional practice of primary teachers who were nominated as effective in promoting literacy in classrooms (Pressley, Yokoi, & Rankin, 2000); however, little work has focused on the peer interactions that take place at literacy centers. This section of the study looked at the peer interactions that transpired at literacy centers in this first-grade classroom and discussed how dialogue supported literacy learning. In this particular section, the indicators of literacy learning that were used for analyses are what Street (1995) would term “autonomous literacies” (p. 140)
typical of the official school culture that emphasizes the skills that children need for reading and writing. Using literacy indicators that the Department of Education in Ohio via the Ohio Academic Content Standards in English Language Arts deemed important and appropriate for first-grade children, this section of the chapter presented a discussion and examples on how the peer interactions at the various literacy centers supported literacy learning.

There are a total of 79 first-grade indicators in the Ohio Academic Content Standards for English Language Arts. Of those 79 indicators, 47 were represented by examples of peer dialogue in this first-grade classroom. Worksheets and literacy tasks were presented to the children to complete at literacy centers to support their literacy learning, yet through peer dialogue, or the unofficial social world of children, many of the tasks became more than mundane, rote, and meaningless work, but rather became opportunities for children to discuss, support, and use literacy in meaningful ways. Children’s participation in official world tasks while participating in an unofficial peer world, allowed them to jointly construct meanings. The children were free to discuss,

Child One: “That’s a /d/. That’s a /b/.”


Child One: Is it wed or web?”

Child Two: That’s a /b/. A circle on this side I know it’s a b.”

argue,

Tina: “It’s a wig.”

Erin: “No it’s not. Pigs don’t have wigs.”
Tina: “Yes.”

Erin: “Its wig. w/i/g, Yes, its wig.”

Tina: “I told you.”

Erin: “A pig had a wig. That doesn’t make sense.”

provide support,

Child: “Tina, I’m think you need to put spaces between your words because it says Cassieto, no to Cassie.”

practice,

Maggie: “Hi, My name is Maggie Snow. And I have a couple things to say before we start the program.” [Then she reads it again.]

discover,

Zachary: “Did you know that chunk has a chunk in it?”

and participate

Zachary: “There are 10 spiders on the spider web.”

David: “No there’s not”

Zachary: “One, two, three…”

David: “Wait, let me count.” [Counts to self] “There’s – let me count and you read.”

Zachary: “There are nine spiders in the tree.”

in activities of their choice to learn literacy skills. It was through creating joint understandings (Vygotsky, 1978) with dialogue that they socially constructed literacy knowledge.
As I consider each of the examples given in this chapter, I wonder if the dialogue is supporting the children as they learn literacy, or if the dialogue is evidence of previously known literacy skills. After a critical examination, I would have to say that it is both. For one child, the peer interaction can be a demonstration of what he/she already knows. For example, when Maggie was trying to support her friends in reading her sisters name, she demonstrated an understanding of the letter sounds and their relationship with letters. She was able to state that the name was “Christina because it has an ‘a’ at the end” (Dec. 5, 2006). However, for her friends, the discussion was an example of how peer dialogue supports literacy learning as they were sharing an understanding with Maggie on an interpsychological or social plane (Vygotsky, 1978). It is difficult to observe if that shared understanding is mediated to an interpsychological plane in children, but it was an exposure to the concept.

However, there are some incidents where the demonstration of a literacy skill is evidence of how peer dialogue has supported literacy learning. When Anna uses the word “funky” to describe how most trolls are, she also shares that she got the word from Erin and that “it was in a book” (Nov. 9, 2006). This is a literacy event that referenced previous peer dialogue and demonstrated how it mediated a social understanding of a word to a personal understanding of that word. Based on examples like this, literacy centers provide an opportunity for children to use and practice the literacy skills that they are learning. They have an opportunity to try out new words as Anna did and they have an opportunity to teach others, which reinforces their own understandings.

The intersection of the official world of children and the unofficial world of children (Dyson, 1993) provided an opportunity for literacy learning in this first-grade
classroom. Mrs. Katola allowed a context for the children to construct a peer culture within the official social world of school. In the overlapping of these two social worlds, children’s dialogue supported literacy learning as defined by the Ohio Academic Content Standards. When educators provide experiences for children where literacy can be demonstrated through play activities we allow children a purposeful rationale for engaging in literacy and literacy-related behaviors and demonstrate what they know (Hall, 1991).

Up to this point, the discussion about how peer dialogue supports literacy learning in a first-grade classroom has focused on autonomous literacy, or the skills needed for reading and writing. This type of “school literacy” treats literacy as an object to be studied and mastered (Hall, 1998). Street and Street (1991) calls this teaching of skills the “pedagogisation of autonomous literacy” which describe ways of teaching literacy that are valued by schools. In many ways, autonomous literacy is privileged, or valued, over other kinds of literacies. “It is one of the paradoxes of schooling that the kinds of texts most privileged in schools are the ones least likely to be pursued once people leave schooling” (Hall, 1998, p. 9). For example, many classrooms spend time teaching children to write poems, but in reality, many people never read a poem outside of school walls, much less write one.

To only look at autonomous literacy skills is to use a narrow definition of literacy. In contrast to autonomous literacy is “the model of ideological literacy, in which literacy draws its meaning and use from being situated within cultural values and practices” (Hall, 1998, p. 10). In this second part of my discussion, I will explore how children in this first-grade classroom learned how to participate in social practices through dialogue with
one anther. Literacy from this perspective is less of an individual, cognitive skill and is focused more on how children participate in literacy events. Literacy moves away from being a set of skills to being a tool for participating in a literate society.

**Types of Peer Dialogue at Literacy Centers**

Literacy centers are a part of the official school world as teachers set up the materials to reinforce the skills that have been mandated by legislation as necessary for a literate world. As previously discussed in this chapter, the peer dialogue at literacy centers and at the art center in this first-grade classroom supported children’s learning of “autonomous” (Street, 1995) literacy skills deemed important by the official world of school. Discrete literacy skills were practiced and used while children participated in dialogue with peers.

However, in addition to children’s learning literacy skills, I questioned what types of interactions children engaged in at literacy centers and an art center in this first-grade classroom. Because so much of the time the teacher is occupied with “official school” activities, the children were free to interact, self-select activities, and construct a peer culture while participating at literacy centers. This analysis moves away from the autonomous literacy learning that peer dialogue supported in the first section of this chapter and focuses now on how literacy is used in everyday life; the ways in which children become a member of the peer culture (Dyson, 1997; Corsaro, 2003; Fernie et al, 1988); and how they learn “ideological” (Street, 1995) literacies. I wondered what the children were talking about, sharing, and discussing as they worked at the various learning centers and how that dialogue supported the construction of a peer culture filled with literacy. This next section of the analysis will explore the various categories or types
of dialogue that supported literacy learning in this first-grade classroom while children were at literacy centers –including Buddy Reading and daily worksheet - and the art center.

I categorized peer dialogue as follows: (1) to affiliate with the community; (2) to develop and use social phrases and cultural practices; (3) to manipulate others; (4) to solve problems; and (5) to play with language. These categories are not in any hierarchical order, but rather reflect the ways in which children used dialogue in this first-grade classroom. Halliday’s (1973) theory regarding functions of language and Bodrova & Leong’s (1996) types of interactions provided a beginning point for me as I began to think about, classify, and categorize the types of peer dialogue in this study.

**Peer Interactions to Affiliate with the Community**

When children enter a school classroom, they enter a new culture – the school culture (Fernie, Kantor, Klein, Meyer, & Elgas, 1988). Within and in response to the school culture, children create their own peer culture (Ramsey, 1991). Dyson (1993) refers to the multiple social worlds of a classroom by describing an ‘official’ sphere, a ‘peer’ sphere, and a ‘home’ sphere (p. 3). In this study, I did not examine the ‘home’ sphere, but observed closely the point of intersection between the “official” classroom world dominated by the classroom teacher and the rules of the school and the “unofficial” classroom world created by interactions between children as they work, play, and talk together in a classroom. Children want to belong, to be a part of a community. As children participate in dialogue they are brought closer to their classmates. They talk about common classroom practices, share stories about themselves, and try to relate classroom tasks to real life experience. These types of interactions help children connect
and affiliate with one another, and to build community. In this community, children use literacy and social practices to create an identity (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005).

Building community in a school classroom builds a strong bond between children. In the following conversation, the two girls question why the school would separate them from their friends. They have created bonds with peers in Kindergarten, only to be mixed with new peers the next year.

Child 1: “Morgan waits for me. Morgan understands how I feel. I wish Morgan was in our class”

Child 2: “Yeah, why do they do that? Separate.”

Child 1: “I don’t know, that’s rude.”

(October 12, 2005)

This is a powerful example of how close children can become in a classroom. They bond during Kindergarten, which, for most children, is a stressful time in their lives. Then when they enter first grade, they are separated from their peers and placed in a first-grade classroom with a different configuration of peers, forcing them to create new bonds.

An environment that supports and allows children to share their lives and participate in dialogue helps them form their identity and be a community, using what Halliday refers to as “Interactional” or “Personal” functions of language. The literacy centers are places where children can share information about themselves and confirm one another’s work, thus creating a strong community.

Sharing Information about Self

One reason why children engage in peer dialogue is to share information about themselves. According to Erickson (1997), children at this age are in a stage of Industry
versus Inferiority and are concerned with mastering skills, peer acceptance, and academic competence, which causes them to often focus on sharing information about how they have mastered skills (Ramsey, 1991). Sharing information about one’s self can be a tool to affiliate with the community or to announce what one is going to do. This next section will focus on the ways that children share information about themselves to accomplish various outcomes.

One task at the art center is to look through selected Eric Carle books and find a picture to use as a guide to create a collage. Even though creating a collage is not a literacy skill as defined by the ELA Content Standards (ODE, 2001), it is a literacy event as defined by this study. It is an individual or shared activity centered on a reading, writing, speaking, or listening activity in which children try to construct meaning about language and/or interpreting symbols of language. When Steve tries to represent his meaning of a graphic picture, he is engaged in a literacy practice. Malaguzzi (1998) calls this type of representation a graphic language and argues metaphorically that a child has a hundred languages and a hundred more. Children use language to express and represent thoughts and ideas. “In some circumstances, meanings are best expressed through words and pictures, whereas in others, movement or three dimensions might be preferable” (Pahl & Rowsell (2005, p. 30). Using this approach to think about language broadly opens up the definition of literacy.

Steve looks through the Eric Carle book to complete this literacy task at the art center. After choosing a picture to represent, the child cuts previously painted paper into the necessary shapes and glues them together to make an Eric Carle-style collage. Even though I usually do not interact with the children, Steve engages me in conversation
about what he has done. Rick also joins our conversation and shares with us what the class has accomplished.

[Steve keeps flipping through the pages and comes to the picture of the whale.]

Steve: “I made that. I made that before. I really, really made this. I made that.”

Erin: “I was going to make it.”

Steve: “I made it though.” [He turns the page.]

Steve: [He flips the page back to the whale]: “You know what I made? I actually made this,” [he says to me as I am passing by.]

Maurer: “Really?”

Steve: “Yea, I made it. It’s on the wall out there, you ought to go see it. I’ll show you something else that I did.”

[Steve, Rick, and I go out into the hall where Steve shows me the collages that he has made. Rick is also showing me all of the ones that are out there.]

Maurer: “Rick, which one did you do?”

Rick: “I haven’t done one yet.”

(December 1, 2005)

Steve is sharing his individual successes and is proud to show me his contributions to the class project. Erin, using dialogue to include herself in the peer culture responds, “I was going to make it.” Steve quickly retorts, “I made it though.” In those four short words, he has marked his success in the community, while questioning the accomplishments of Erin. Rick, who has not contributed to the project at this point, still sees himself as part of
the group and takes pride in sharing the work of the class. It appears that Rick did not feel the need to complete an individual task to consider himself a part of the community. Rick understood that creating a collage was a social practice valued in this community. Even though he had not participated in the creation of a product, or what might be considered a literacy artifact, he was learning the roles and ideologies demonstrated and valued by the teacher and peers in this society (Rowe, 2008). This could be because Mrs. Katola did not include individual names on the class project allowing Rick the ability to feel like a part of the community by sharing the work of others. Surprisingly, Steve did not dispute Rick’s role in the community as he did with Erin, rather he accepted the position of Rick in the community.

Oftentimes, children shared individual accomplishments with the class and tried to teach other children how to do the task as a way to participate in the community. An example was when Sarah learned how to write her name in cursive.

Sarah: “You want me to show you how to write my name in cursive? I’ll show you. You make an S like this, then you, kind of like an a.”

(December 1, 2005)

By sharing her new literacy skill, she is creating a place for herself in the classroom community. In another example, Sarah tries to fit into this community by sharing her phone number with Tabitha.

Tabitha: “Thank you Sarah.”

Sarah: “You’re welcome. You can call me once I get home.”

Erin: “I’m going to draw a picture.”

Tabitha: “I can’t call you tonight because I got church and I got to go to the ….”
Sarah: “You can call me after you get back.”

Tabitha: “That’s going to be really late at night.”

(November 16, 2005)

After Sarah gives Tabitha her phone number, she tells her when to call. When Tabitha tries to explain how that time will not work, Sarah keeps insisting that Tabitha call her, even if it is late. Intermixed into the conversation is a short announcement by Erin who states, “I’m going to draw a picture.” It is as if she is trying to become a part of the dialogue by inserting herself into the conversation by engaging in a literacy event of drawing a picture. Rather than respond, Sarah and Tabitha continue with their conversation. Both Erin and Sarah want to be a part of the community and are using literacy practices to become a member of that group: Sarah tries to include herself by demonstrating new skills (writing her name in cursive), as well as engaging in a literacy practice (giving out her personal phone number and asking children to call her). Meanwhile Erin attempts inclusion by announcing that she is going to create a picture. Each has learned ways in which literacy is used and valued in their society.

Once Sarah begins to give her phone number to her peers, others join in this social literacy practice and also begin to pass around their phone numbers to classmates. Steve is looking at a book and finds a paper with a phone number on it. He questioningly looks at the paper with the phone number on it.

Sarah: “Don’t take that phone number.”

Steve: “Why?”

Sarah: “Because it is Tabitha’s. Do you want my phone number?”

Steve: “Sure. Wow, look at that guy” referring to the book that he was looking at.
Steve: “I did. I will write it down real quick. 555-2694,” [she says it as she writes it down.]

Steve: “Thanks”

Sarah: “Do you want me to put my name on so you remember who it is better?”

(November 16, 2005)

Sarah has found a way to make herself known in the community and has shared a personal literacy artifact with others to establish her membership in the classroom. Sarah learned and brought to school with her literacies learned at home. She had learned how to write her name in cursive, a skill that is not a part of the official school literacy skills, but is valued at home. She shared that practice in what is called a “third space” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005) formed in the intersection between what is valued at home and what is valued at school. Writing one’s name is a school literacy and writing your name in cursive is a home literacy (for this first-grade child). By bringing the two literacies together in this third space, she not only was practicing literacy, but she was creating an identity and socially affiliating herself in the community.

Making Announcements

Another method that children use to affiliate with the peer community is to make announcements about their actions as they are working. In this exchange between peers, the first child states what she is going to do and then the second child shares his plan. They are participating in the peer culture by declaring what they will be doing.

Erin: “I’m doing a ladybug.”
Steve: “I'm doing a whale and then I am doing a ladybug.”

(October 20, 2005)

As one listens to the verbal dialogue in a language rich environment, one hears many pronouncements made by children about the literacy tasks in which they are involved. Announcements are made to serve several functions. See Table 4.1 for details.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type or Function of Announcement</th>
<th>Example of Announcement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To declare what has been done</td>
<td>Child: “Here’s a B. I just found a B.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To state what is going to happen</td>
<td>Nick: “I’m going to write a note.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To tell what is going on presently</td>
<td>Maggie: “I’m coloring the socks red because it is cold and icky.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To share a task</td>
<td>Zachary: “I can spell Nick without looking.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To state a need</td>
<td>Molly: “I need a black to write my name.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Types of announcements.

Children proclaim what they are going to do before they actually do it. In addition to procuring status in the community, an announcement provides children direction for their experience. Many young children will talk to themselves or give a running commentary on their activity as they work. This type of dialogue is known as pole-bridging (Palmer & Bayley, 2005) and seems to be important for cognitive growth. If a
child states the activity, he/she makes an abstract thought concrete by stating it out loud, which allows him/her to think about the idea, hear the task, and focus on the activity. In this way, children lead their own development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Furthermore, by stating the activity, children test the waters before they “take the plunge”. As children learn to take ownership of their actions and interact in a social setting, they may be apprehensive about doing something that will seem odd to their peers. By stating what is going to happen, children allow their peers a chance to accept or reject the action before it becomes a social faux pas. If it is an act that peers question or find offensive, the plan can be changed before it is executed, thus allowing the child to conform to social norms as demonstrated in the next scene. Two girls are at the table gluing pictures onto a worksheet. Erin announces how she is going to use the glue, and Maggie advises her on the correct procedure, helping her to follow classroom procedures. This allows Erin to change her action before she performs it incorrectly.

Erin [laughs]: “I’m only putting one dot in the middle. I’m only putting one dot in the middle.”

Maggie: “It’s supposed to be dot, dot, dot.”

(November 17, 2005)

Children announce their upcoming actions as a way to build social bonds with one another. In addition, when children state their activities, they support themselves by verbalizing thoughts into audible directions. Furthermore, announcements help children participate in the peer culture. Children use dialogue at literacy centers to support the life of the peer culture.
Confirming One Another's Work

Everyone wants to hear that they have completed a task successfully or they want to be recognized for a job well done. In this first-grade classroom, children would confirm each other’s efforts with verbal praises as when Stacey walked past the art center and saw a turkey. Her response was natural and genuine as she confirmed Anna’s work.

Stacey: “Hey, who made a turkey?”

Anna: “Tina.”

Stacey: “Cool, Tina, I like that.”

(November 9, 2005)

Children would also confirm each other’s literacy skills. In this scene, Sissie and Erin are working on a worksheet to fill in the middle vowel sound of specified words. As they work together to complete the task, Erin supports Sissie’s efforts to spell ‘pen.’

Sissie: “/p/, /e/, /e/.”

Erin: “I think it would be an e.”

[Sissie writes an e as she verbalizes the sound]: “/e/. Like that?”

Erin: “Yep, good girl.”

(November 17, 2005)

Conversely, sometimes a child will ask another child for confirmation, as seen in the following examples.

Tabitha: “Erin, Erin. I. Did I write my name neatly?”

Erin: “Yeah, that’s good.”

(November 22, 2005)

Or
Sarah: “How do you like mine, Tabitha?”
Tabitha: “I like it a lot, Sarah.”
Sarah: “I used some green and some orange.”
Tabitha: “That looks pretty, Sarah.”

(November 16, 2005)

Rarely, children use self putdowns, as can be seen in the following interaction between Zachary and Tina.

Tina: “Mine is hideous.”
Zachary: “Is not.”
Tina: “Is too.”
Zachary: “Is not.”
Tina: “Is too.”
Zachary: “Stop saying it.”

(January 18, 2006)

It is difficult to determine whether Tina has given an honest appraisal of her work or if she is hoping for confirmation, but Zachary cannot deal with the critical remarks and tries to encourage Tina’s work. When Tina continues to persist, Zachary demands she stop saying that her work is hideous.

When children are engaged for long periods of time in self-selected and self-directed literacy activities, they turn to each other to offer and receive the verbal praise and recognition of their peers. Again, thinking of Erikson’s Stage of Inferiority vs. Industry, we see that peer dialogue provides support and encouragement as children delight in one another’s work. Through dialogue, children become a community.
Peer Interactions to Develop Cultural Phrases and Share Cultural Meanings

Important for group affiliation is the construction of shared meanings. Children use social phrases and cultural practices to participate in a peer culture. The dialogue of peers supports the understanding of cultural idioms and phrases that are referenced in many aspects of their lives. Many of these cultural phrases are learned in a child’s home domain and are brought to the school domain. As children share these new social phrases and cultural practices with one another, they support each other in developing situated literacy practices or “ideological” literacies (Street, 1985). A child who does not understand the hidden meaning of cultural phrases will encounter difficulties being included into a group, as well as understanding both oral conversations and written text when these phrases are used. Social phrases and cultural practices are important in a child’s learning of literacy. An environment where children have opportunities to share and apply cultural phrases that they know is beneficial in supporting them in learning the literacy practices of their language and culture, and also in their affiliation with one another.

Using Cultural Phrases

In the following example, two girls are working at the writing center where each is to illustrate a poem about stars. Maggie wants to draw stars on top of her paper as part of the illustration but states to Molly her inadequate ability at making stars. Molly offers to make the stars for her. While the girls work side by side on this literacy event, they not only have the opportunity to discuss the poem, but also are able to discuss the significance and meaning of a socially constructed practice. In this case, they discuss the cultural practice of wishing upon stars.
Maggie: “I’m not very good at stars.”
Molly: “That’s okay, I will make stars.”
Molly: “Here, I’ll do that.”
Maggie: “I like it.”
Molly: “Do you like my stars?”
Maggie: “Yep, they’re awesome. Stars rock, don’t they?”
Molly: “Yeah.”
Maggie: “’Cause they give you wishes.”
Molly: “There are a lot of stars when you look out. All alone I sneak
out at midnight, I sneak out and uhm, and I uhm.”
Maggie: “Wish for stars, wish on stars?”
Molly: “Yeah.”
Maggie: “So do I, but I just stay inside and open my window so the stars
can hear me and everybody doesn’t.”
Molly: “I just be really loud and I don’t really care if anybody wakes
up.”
Maggie: “But then it won’t come true, because if someone wakes up they’ll hear
your wish and then it won’t come true.”
Molly: “Actually, no one wakes up for mine because they are just so tired that
they can’t do it.”
Maggie: “There, that’s done. Do you want to put a background on this?”
Molly: “Yeah.”

(October 12, 2005)
Listening to the conversation, we learn that Maggie knows a lot about stars and the significance they have in her culture. Acting as the expert in this dialogue, Maggie shares her knowledge about stars with Molly. Bodrova and Leong (1996) would categorize this type of peer interaction of ‘expert/novice’ as beneficial to development. Using what Halliday (1975) terms “representational language,” a function of language to communicate content, Maggie shares with Molly that you wish on stars and that they give you wishes unless someone hears your wish – in which case, your wish will not come true. Even though Molly is an active participant in the conversation, she demonstrates weak background knowledge about stars. As Maggie leads the conversation, Molly seems to be just learning about the myths surrounding stars. It is as if she is making up information about her relationship with stars as Maggie leads the conversation about stars and the cultural practices that go with them.

Maggie: “Yep, they’re awesome. Stars rock, don’t they?”

Molly: “Yeah.”

Maggie: “Cause they give you wishes.”

Molly: “There are a lot of stars when you look out. All alone I sneak out at midnight, I sneak out and uhm, and I uhm.”

(October 12, 2005)

In response to Maggie’s declaration of stars giving you wishes, Molly responds that she sneaks out at night, but cannot verbalize what she does when she looks at the stars. Maggie supplies the words for what Molly does.

Maggie: “Wish for stars, wish on stars?”
Molly: “Yeah.”

(October 12, 2005)

Then Maggie continues to share what she does at night when she looks at stars and concludes that everyone does the same.

Maggie: “So do I, but I just stay inside and open my window so the stars can hear me and everybody doesn’t.”

(October 12, 2005)

Not wanting to seem like she does not know about wishing on stars, Molly responds that she is loud

Molly: “I just be really loud and I don’t really care if anybody wakes up.”

(October 12, 2005)

Again, Maggie leads Molly’s understanding of the cultural practice by sharing what happens if others hear your wish.

Maggie: “But then it won’t come true, because if someone wakes up they’ll hear your wish and then it won’t come true.”

(October 12, 2005)

Molly again has to think quickly to share how her loud request to the stars will not be a problem.

Molly: “Actually, no one wakes up for mine because they are just so tired that they can’t do it.”

(October 12, 2005)

Maggie does not have a response to Molly’s last remark, as the task of illustrating the poem is complete, and she is ready to move on to something else.
Maggie: “There, that’s done. Do you want to put a background on this?”

Molly: “Yeah.”

(October 12, 2005)

Initiated by and situated in a literacy task, Maggie shared a cultural practice with Molly during a peer interaction thus supporting her cultural understandings. Molly, with the assistance of Maggie, was learning social literacies or becoming literate in understanding and using the phrases of her culture. It seems as if Molly had only a vague understanding of the meaning of wishing upon a star, but Maggie, the more knowledgeable other supported her in learning this cultural practice.

In the following example, we see a less successful attempt between peers at using a cultural phrase. David and Zachary are at the book nook literacy center and Zachary suggests that the two of them put a puzzle together on the life cycle of a butterfly. David really does not want to work on a puzzle and instead tries to get Zachary to change his mind.

David: “Let’s do this pop stand.”

Zachary: “What?”

David: “Let’s do this pop stand.”

Zachary: “What?”

David: “Let’s do this pop stand.”

Zachary: “What?”

David: “You know, pop stand. You know, like.”

Zachary: “I put another piece together. Hooray for me.”

(October 6, 2005)
David tries to get Zachary to change his mind by using a cultural phrase or idiom, “Let’s blow this pop stand,” which means “let’s get out of here quickly.” Unfortunately, he uses the phrase incorrectly and then cannot explain what he meant when Zachary questions him about it. After Zachary asks three times what David means, he changes the tone of the conversation by announcing that he has put another piece of the puzzle together. Even though David is unable to use the cultural idiom correctly, by working in a language rich environment, he had the opportunity to practice the idioms, or social literacies of his culture. Someday, both David and Zachary will be able to correctly use the phrase “let’s blow this pop stand” and others will know what they mean.

A language-rich environment filled with verbal dialogue allows children a chance to practice and develop social phrases. When given freedom to talk with peers, children can learn about roles and textual intentions as they share cultural practices and try to apply the cultural phrases that they have heard. This ultimately helps them understand both oral and written text, enabling them to become more literate in their language and culture. Therefore, it is important that we as educators provide an environment filled with language in our classrooms.

*Share Cultural Meanings*

When children interact with peers, they are confronted with new ideas and theories about life. Vygotsky (1978) theorized that all learning is social constructed, with new ideas shared first on a social plane, and then internalized on an intrapsychological plane. As children dialogue with one another, they make changes in their own understandings and share cultural meanings. The following example demonstrates how
one child can offer a theory about life that causes the second child to adjust his/her thinking as they construct shared meanings.

Three children are working at a table on a worksheet and are using scissors as part of the cut-and-paste activity. The table is overflowing with paper scraps and Maggie’s scissors are lost under the pile of bits and pieces of paper. She shares this information with Erin and unexpectedly, in the midst of a shared literacy event, a philosophical discussion commences.

Maggie: “Guess what Erin, all of a sudden my scissors are gone.”
Sissie: “She has to find her scissors. She doesn’t know where they are.”
Erin: “There they are. Up there.”
Maggie: “No, they’re red.”
Erin: “Oh.”
Beth: “They’re red?”
Erin: “Then I don’t know where they are.”
Maggie: “One time, uhm, when I lost my scissors, and like when I came back and looked they were there. Weird!”
Sissie (in a spooky voice): “Maybe it was a ghost that was haunting you.”
Maggie: “Nu, uhn. There’s no ghost in the real world.”
Erin: “Uh, hu. Seriously.”
Maggie: “There’s ghosts in the world?”
Erin: “Uh hu, spirits is ghosts.”
Maggie: “Well, there’s no such thing as spirits.”
Erin: “Yes there is.”
Maggie: “No there isn’t.”

Erin: “Uh uhn, Then how can God get people up there?”

Maggie: “Oh yeah.”

Erin: “Oh yeah.”

Unknown: “Maggie, Is there spirits?”

Maggie: “Yeah.”

Unknown: “Do you believe in spirits?”

Maggie: “Now I do.”

Maggie: “Because spirits is God.”

Unknown: “I didn’t know that.”

(December 6, 2006)

When the idea of a ghost first comes up, Maggie states her theory about ghosts in the real world:

Sissie (in a spooky voice): “Maybe it was a ghost that was haunting you.”

Maggie: “Nu, uhn. There’s no ghost in the real world.”

(December 6, 2006)

But then when Erin confirms what Sissie has suggested, Maggie begins to wonder and even verbalizes the question.

Erin: “Uh, hu. Seriously.”

Maggie: “There’s ghosts in the world?”

(December 6, 2006)

Erin affirms that there are ghost in the world and then backs up her assertion by not only explaining what a ghost is, but also the purpose of spirits. That allows Maggie to once
again refute what Erin is saying. But when Erin poses a question that leaves Maggie speechless, she starts to relent on her understanding. She is assimilating new information and accommodating her current understanding to adjust her theories about ghosts.

Erin: “Uh hu, spirits is ghosts.”
Maggie: “Well, there’s no such thing as spirits.”
Erin: “Yes there is.”
Maggie: “No there isn’t.”
Erin: “Uh uhn, Then how can God get people up there?”
Maggie: “Oh yeah.”

(December 6, 2006)

As Maggie ponders this new idea, another child questions her about the theory. She responds and shares her reason why. Based on new information gained from this peer dialogue at the literacy center, Maggie has adapted her ideas and accepted a socially constructed shared meaning about ghosts.

Unknown: “Maggie, Is there spirits?”
Maggie: “Yeah.”
Unknown: “Do you believe in spirits?”
Maggie: “Now I do.”
Maggie: “Because spirits is God.”
Unknown: “I didn’t know that.”

(December 6, 2006)

As children work and interact with each other and materials, they create a peer culture filled with theories to support their understanding of the world in which they live.
A language-rich environment allows children to share their understandings on various beliefs, ponder new ideas posed by others, and make changes in their own worldview.

Peer Interactions Used to Manipulate Others

Another type of peer interaction observed in this classroom was one of manipulation or dialogue to skillfully influence another’s actions to derive a desired outcome. Halliday (1973) calls this function of language “regulatory” or the use of language to regulate the behavior of others. Peer culture is developed because kids want to gain control of their lives (Corsaro, 2003); however, within the peer culture, there is a social culture created that is based on relationships of personal power. According to Ramsey (1991), children form peer relationships for various reasons including when a child feels insecure or as a reaction to the social dynamics of the classroom. In some peer relationships, a dominant/submissive affiliation is formed allowing some children to become leaders and/or dominant peers while others become followers and sometimes even submissive. As children develop social relationships in a peer culture, they use language, artifacts, and personal friendships to control other children. This type of manipulation is otherwise known as relational bullying (Henkin, 2005) or when one child isolates others by withdrawing friendship or spreading rumors. Girls, or Queen Bees (Wiseman, 2002) tend to use this type of manipulation to bully other girls. Typically thought to occur in Junior High, studies from Brigham Young University show that relational aggression may begin with children as young as four and five (Fischio, 2005). This section will look at the various forms of manipulation that children used in this classroom including: threatening to tell the teacher; offering both material gifts and
personal friendships; and changing the task to make it more interesting so that others will conform.

_Threatening to Tell the Teacher_

In a classroom, there are times when children do not feel comfortable in their own abilities to confront an issue or solve a problem, so they will lean on a source of known power in the classroom – the teacher. Even in a classroom in which children share power with the teacher, the influence that comes with being the adult in the room is a source of authority on which children rely or reference for several outcomes. About 40% of the time that the children at literacy centers in this classroom referenced a need for a teacher it was to ask for assistance in a task, to question whether they were allowed to do something, or to share their work. However, the remaining 60% of references made by a child threatening to “tell the teacher” were to manipulate other children and control the situation to get his/her desired outcome. Ironically, in the formation of a culture where children wanted to gain control over their lives, they used the source of established power (the teacher) to manipulate others.

Even though the words “I’m telling the teacher” are common, the dialogue concerning the need for a teacher can be used for strictly manipulative reasons, with seemingly little intention of the actual act being carried out. It can be used as a way for one child to say to another child that a boundary has been crossed and to state something that he/she is unable to express in a more direct, confrontational manner as seen in the following example. Anna and Zachary are working side by side at the art center when Anna makes a generic comment to no one in particular. Zachary answers as if she is
referencing him. When she responds by calling Zachary a name, in a way he considers inappropriate, Zachary threatens to tell the teacher.

Anna: “Thank you for life.”

Zachary: “You’re welcome.”

Anna: “Not you, ding dong.”

Zachary: “I’m telling.”

Anna: “I’m sorry, Zachary.”

(October 26, 2005)

Zachary does not want anyone to call him ding dong; yet, instead of making a statement to confront the name calling, he threatens to tell the teacher, leaning on the teacher as the source of power in the classroom. In this example, it seems that both the giver and the receiver of the threat understand the hidden message, which is that Zachary does not like to be called names. Zachary’s threat to tell the teacher is a form of manipulation that results in Anna apologizing to Zachary.

At other times, a threat to tell the teacher and a physical movement toward her are used to get another child to do something that the first child wants or desires. In the following example, Steve and Sarah both want the same object. Sarah wants to take it from Steve, even though he thinks he should be the one to use it. When Steve cannot convince Sarah that he should have it, he states that he is going to tell the teacher and walks in the teacher’s direction.

Steve: “You can’t have it. I’m telling.” He walks away from the table.

Sarah calls after him. “Steve, Steve, Steve.” Sarah gets up and goes after him.

(October 28, 2005)
At that point, I lost the conversation, but when they came back to the work table, Steve had the object that they had fought over, and they had not involved the teacher. The threat of the teacher and the physical movement toward her was enough to convince Sarah to let Steve have the object.

Children also state they are going to tell the teacher so that they can open up a dialogue about other, more important issues. In this example, a friendship is at stake, and using the threat of telling the teacher manipulates the second child to concede.

Sarah: “I’m telling.”
Erin: “Are you telling on me?”
Sarah: “I’m telling on both of you.”
Erin: “I thought you were my friend.”
Sarah: “Nope.”
Erin: “Why am I not your friend now?”
Sarah: “Because you didn’t do what I said.”
Erin: “It just accidentally happened. I didn’t do it on purpose.”

(October 28, 2005)

When Sarah threatens to tell the teacher, she is able to open up the dialogue and share her frustration that Erin is not doing what she wants. Rizzo, (as cited in Ramsey, 1991, p. 48) states that “disputes between friends often reflect one partner’s desire to get the other one to conform more closely to his idea of what a friend should be”. When Sarah said she was going to tell the teacher, she was using the teacher as a form of manipulation to get Erin to apologize for not following her orders, something she sees as a trait of a friend.
Even though there were many examples of children saying that they were going to ‘tell the teacher’, rarely did children in this classroom take situations to a teacher. In other words, the threat of telling the teacher, or the referring to a known source of power was an act of manipulation used by children.

*Offering Gifts and Friendship*

In addition to telling the teacher, children in this classroom manipulated others by offering incentives such as money, gifts, and personal attention. In the following example, Sarah is sharing a story with a group of girls about a conflict that she had with Nancy. Sarah is unhappy that the teacher talked to her about the way that she treated Nancy, and she is trying to convince others in the class that Nancy lied to the teacher about being hit. Finally, she uses a tangible reward for friendship allegiance.

Sarah: “Because I tattled. I know she hit me and she says she didn’t. She really hit me. Do you believe me?”

Erin: “Yeah.”

Tabitha: “Yeah.”

Sarah: “She really hit me.”

Erin: “If I don’t believe you I wouldn’t be your friend, but I do believe you.”

Sarah: “I wouldn’t give you money if you didn’t believe me.”

(October 28, 2005)

Sarah must have followed through with her promise of money because they left the site of the camera for a few minutes, but when they came back Erin stated that Sarah had given her two quarters. Sarah had paid Erin with money as a form of manipulation to acquire what she wanted, which was, someone to be her friend - to believe her.
In this next example, Sarah offers multiple gifts as forms of manipulation to influence Steve to do what she wants him to do. She and Steve are working together at a table when Mia asks Steve to help her with the computer, but Sarah wants Steve to stay with her. Steve is torn between wanting to help Mia with the computer and to comply with Sarah, especially when she offers to bring him a gift of Silly String. It is an internal conflict for all: for Steve, as he tries to find a balance between what he wants and what he thinks is the right thing to do; for Sarah, as she struggles with issues of power; and for Mia, as she finds it difficult to get the help she needs.

Mia: “Try, Come over here and try to get my computer to go.”

Sarah: “Nope, he staying with me. Are you?”

Steve responds hesitantly: “Yeah.”

Sarah: “Unless you don’t want Silly String once a week.”

Steve responds more adamantly: “Yeah.”

(November 21, 2005)

At first, Steve hesitantly agrees to meet Sarah’s demand to stay with her. Seeing his hesitation, Sarah dangles the promise of Silly String in front of him. Since he wants the Silly String, he agrees to stay with her. Yet, Mia still needs his help so Steve asks Sarah’s permission to help Mia.

Mia: “Steve, come over here and help me?”

Steve asks Sarah: “Can I just help her?”

(November 21, 2005)

This demonstrates the power that Sarah has over Steve at this point as he looks to her for what he can and cannot do. As Sarah remains quiet, Steve realizes that he does not have
permission to help Mia and still get the Silly String that Sarah is offering, so he apologizes to Mia.

Steve: “Sorry for …”

Sarah: “Don’t listen to her. Just don’t listen to her.”

Mia: “Steve please, it’s your choice, not hers. I’m trying to figure out (the computer). No or yes?”

Steve: “I’m trying to figure out what choice to make.”

Mia: “No or yes?”

Steve: “What?”

(November 21, 2005)

Mia responds that it is not Sarah’s choice but his. She tells him that he can choose for himself. As Mia again asks if he chooses yes or no, Sarah imposes her answer by stating that she chooses “no,” and then again threatens that Steve will not get Silly String if he helps Mia.

Mia: “No or yes?”

Sarah: “My head chooses ‘no’.”

Mia: “Yes or no Steve, your choice.”

Sarah: “If he doesn’t work out, he’s not going to get Silly String.”

(November 21, 2005)

Steve chooses not to help and writes his answer in the air with a marker.

Steve: “Mia, watch this.” He puts his marker in the air and draws – no.

Sarah: “Why are you two staring at the marker?” Mia takes a marker.

(November 21, 2005)
When Mia also uses a marker it causes Sarah to feel even more insecure, and she ups the ante so to speak, by threatening to tell Mia’s mother. This makes Mia angry.

Sarah: “Why are you taking the marker?”

Mia: “I need it”

Sarah: “You want me to call your mom?”

Steve: “It’s N, O. It’s N, O. NO”

Mia: “Fine. No. Everyone is helping is me and I can’t get it to go. It’s not my fault. I made the wrong choice.”

Steve walks over the computer to see what he can do.

(November 21, 2005)

When Mia laments that she has made a bad choice with the computer, it seems to be enough for Steve to discount Sarah’s wishes and he goes to the computer to help Mia. When Sarah declares that he will not get any Silly String he simply tells her that his grandmother will buy him some.

Sarah: “Steve, you’re not going to get Silly String. That’s it. No Silly String for you.”

Steve: “My grandma’s gonna buy me some. My grandma’s gonna buy me some.”

Sarah: “Fine, I’ll get you some Silly String anyways.”

Steve: “My grandma’s going to get me some for sure”

(November 21, 2005)

Not wanting to be left without power, Sarah tempts Steve with an invitation to her birthday party. When he does not respond, she loses her power over him and the conversation is over.
Sarah: “Aren’t you going to come to my birthday?”

No answer

Sarah: “Steve, aren’t you going to come, Steve, are you listening? Are you going to come to my birthday party?”

Sarah works quietly for several minutes as that is the end of the conversation.

(November 21, 2005)

In this last example, Sarah uses toys, threats of tattling, and an invitation to a birthday party to manipulate Steve into doing what she wants him to do. Mia asks Steve to help her with the computer, a literacy event, and Steve has to make a decision whether to engage in providing support for Mia or shun her to earn the gifts that Sarah is providing. Learning more than literacy skills, Steve is learning ways of using literacy in social situations. Not being able to tell Mia “no”, Steve states, “Mia, watch this.” He puts his marker in the air and draws – no. Sarah responds by asking, “Why are you two staring at the marker?” Mia takes a marker and before we know if she is going to write a word in the air with it, Sarah intervenes by asking Mia, “You want me to call your mom?” This seems to give Steve the courage to say, “It’s N, O. It’s N, O. NO”. With one last attempt to solicit help, Mia responds, “Fine. No. Everyone is helping is me and I can’t get it to go. It’s not my fault. I made the wrong choice.” Finally, Steve walks over the computer to see what he can do.

In elementary grades, relationships are more stable than in preschool, however, “children’s own needs still predominate, and they often pressure their friends to comply with their wishes by threatening to end the friendship” (Ramsey, 1991, p. 21). In the previous situation, the manipulative tactics of Sarah looked as if they would work on
Steve; however, in the end he was able to stand up to Sarah and do what he thought was right. In this situation, writing the word “no” in the air was deeper than the autonomous literacy skills valued by schools, but was a literacy practice used to support Steve in a social literacy. Steve used the marker to write his answer in the air, proclaiming his allegiance to Sarah and her friendship. Overcome with a need to support Mia, Steve breaks away from the manipulation of Sarah and supports Mia in a literacy practice with the computer. This vignette demonstrates how literacy is used in a social setting, thus demonstrating the “ideological” literacies described by Street (1995).

**Offering Intriguing Activities**

Using a more subtle form of manipulation, children learn to offer a different, more interesting task as a way to influence other children’s behaviors (Ramsey, 1991). In the next example, Nancy wants to play school with Mia and asks, “Mia, will you help me with this book?” When Mia does not respond, Nancy repeats her question, but Alice and Mia are both doing their individual work at the center and do not listen to Nancy. Mia leaves to go to the bathroom, ignoring Nancy and her request. While she is gone, Nancy moves to the word zone area and begins to play with the name cards and picture cards that are in a pocket chart. In this popular classroom activity, children take name cards out of the chart and then match a person’s name card with his/her picture; however, Nancy takes Mia’s name card from the pocket chart and places it back in vertically rather than horizontally. When Mia returns, Nancy tells her to look at her name and then commences to laugh. Mia becomes intrigued with this game and participates in the play by trading Steve and Nancy’s name cards so Steve’s name is with Nancy’s picture and Nancy’s picture is with Steve’s name. Nancy laughs, and they continue to play together at the
name/picture pocket chart. In this example, Nancy entices Mia to play with her by changing the environment to create a more intriguing activity. Nancy uses a school literacy task of matching names to pictures, to create an active engagement of play with Mia, demonstrating that literacy is more than a skill, but is used to socially engage in society. Even though it is still a manipulative act, it is more subtle than threatening to tell the teacher or offering rewards for desired behavior.

**Peer Interactions to Solve Problems**

When children interact at literacy centers in a language-rich environment, they are confronted with many conflicts (both big and small) that need to be resolved. However, Ramsey (1991) tells us that “conflicts provide an impetus for children to increase their social understanding”, challenging the assumptions of children and allowing them to see the perspective of others (p. 36). Most situations are not of great magnitude, but do need resolution to keep peace in the classroom. When children are in a supportive environment, they have the opportunity to work out many of their own confrontations without depending on the teacher. In this study, children employed various problem solving strategies, which included both dialogue and socially-constructed psychological tools.

At Buddy Reading time, children are instructed to choose books that they would like to read for the day. This straightforward activity of choosing a book, or solving a simple problem, allows for many processes to occur in the classroom. The methods children use to choose a book are varied, and include several of Halliday’s functions of language, such as instrumental, personal, imaginative, and representational. For instance, some may choose a book based on the illustrations as seen when Steve exclaims, “I like
that book. I like the pictures,” a personal function. Children also choose a book to read based on personal preference as seen here when Zachary picks a book and explains, “Choose a funny one, the one about the pants that fall down.” Zachary is using regulatory language as he is telling Tina which book to pick, but then he uses representational language to share with Tina what the book is about. Sometimes children will choose a book because it is new, as when Zachary declares, “I’m going to read one I haven’t read before,” this declaration reflecting a personal function of language. Other times, a book is chosen because it is familiar, as heard in Steve’s remark: “Me, I like. We should get We Like Fish again. Do We Like Fish again! Do We Like Fish again!” Squealing in laughter, “Do We Like Fish again!” Here, regulatory and imaginative functions of language overlap, as Steve states what he likes, along with using playful language.

In addition, children can use psychological tools to help them make a choice. In their external form, psychological tools are artificial formations or artifacts formed by social and historical context that alter the flow of internal mental functions. The aim of psychological tools is to control or enhance the natural and cognitive processes of an individual. When a person or persons interact(s) with a psychological tool, the tool acts as a mediator to a higher mental function, thus altering an action (Kozulin, 1998, Wertsch, 1991, Vygotsky, 1978). For example, when given a situation where two equal but opposing resolutions are posed and there is uncertainty, an application of a psychological tool (e.g., casting lots) can be used to make a decision (Kozulin, 1998). In the following situation, the two boys could not decide on a book to read, so they decided to play the game ‘Thumb Wars’ to see who would decide to choose the book. In Thumb Wars, two children interlock their fingers while allowing their thumbs freedom to move about. They
count off and then each tries to pin the other’s thumb down with the force of his/her own thumb. While Steve is laughing David exclaims:

David: “Actually, we have to do a thumb war. We have to do a thumb war. I vote for this and you vote for that one.”

David: “Go. Now.”

Steve: “One, two, three.”

David: “Four, five, six, seven, eight nine, nine, eleven. I did it 10! I did it, Yeah, We’re going to read this book!”

(December 12, 2006)

By implementing a socially constructed psychological tool, children are able to solve a problem with little conflict. This tool allows them to continue on with the process of reading, rather than wasting the next few minutes arguing over which book to read.

Other times, the problem is resolved using dialogue, or peer interactions, in which children have to ‘cooperate to complete tasks’ and ‘act as sounding boards’ for one another (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). As children work together to solve problems each child shares his/her opinions and together, the group comes to a decision. In the following example, a group of children are working together at the art center. They have been instructed to use paint to illustrate the sentence that the whole class has written as part of the class interactive writing lesson. Cassie, who arrives at the center first, has already decided how the group should proceed and she goes to get supplies. When the rest of the group arrives, they each have a different idea, and a heated dialogue ensues. However, the children eventually come to a resolution by themselves.

Cassie: “Stop, stop, stop. No, No. We’re doing it on the table.” She starts to pick
up the paper.

Steve: “We can do it on the floor if we want to.”

Cassie: “No, We all have to work on it. It’s easier on the table.”

Steve: “No it isn’t.”

Sarah: “Yes it is.”

Mia: “No it isn’t. All of you are supposed to paint it. Two of you can fit right here.”

Steve: “I can’t fit. I have to sit right here.” Steve moves to where Cassie expects them to work to show that he will not have any room. He stands perfectly still and holds his hands close to his body.

Cassie, turning toward Sarah and ignoring Steve, “No, stop. You didn’t hear the teacher. We have to [unintelligible].”

Sarah: “On the floor sounded better, guys.”

Steve moves his hands to show the vast work area if they worked on the floor.

Cassie is still talking to Sarah and Mia is trying to help solve the problem, even though it is not her group.

Mia: “One of you guys do it on top and one can... Guys, guys I gotta think.”

Cassie: “Stop Mia, you’re not in the center.”

Mia: “Why don’t you do it on the…”

Cassie: “Stop!”

Mia: “floor. One of you can do…”

Cassie: “Stop!”

Mai: “it at the floor and all can.”
Cassie: “We can all do it.”

Mia: “I know. I am telling you a way you can do it.”

Steve holds hands out in between the two girls as if directing traffic.

Steve: “Guys, uh, uh, uh” until they are quiet momentarily.

Steve: “What about if we get in a line?”

Cassie repeats “Stop, stop” while Steve is talking.

Steve: “Why don’t we get in a line?”

Cassie: “Stop.”

Mia: “Why don’t you listen to Steve?”

Cassie: “Quiet. Okay.”

(January 12, 2006)

Each child has a chance to share his/her idea, to demonstrate, and to persuade the group on how to accomplish the task. In the end, Cassie is able to relent her own opinion and go with what the group decides is best. Surrounded by and engaged in a literacy event, children learn more than decoding written symbols (reading) and creating visual symbols (illustrating), but learn to apply and use literacy in social settings where multiple view points need to be spoken and heard. Children have real reasons for using literacy by participating in problem-solving situations, as they allow children to become stronger in oral communication, to use various functions of language (Halliday, 1975), and to participate in peer interactions that are beneficial to development (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). They learn to state their opinions in a clear, concise manner, listen to others, take in information, and critique ideas to arrive at an amicable decision. This classroom teacher supported children’s social development by allowing the children the opportunity
to solve their own problems: rather than interfering in the peer culture, Mrs. Katola allowed the children to find ways to solve their own problems.

Peer Interactions to Play with Language

“Play is an essential element in community life…and community pulse is strengthened as students share in a playful spirit as they collaborate in purposeful work” (Peterson, 1992, p. 55). In the first-grade classroom that I observed, children interacted in many play situations. Most researchers agree (Garvey, 1990, p. 4) that the following characteristics can be used to define play:

1. Play is pleasurable, enjoyable.
2. Play has no extrinsic goals. Its motivations are intrinsic.
3. Play is spontaneous and voluntary . . . freely chosen by the player.
4. Play involves some active engagement on the part of the player.

These four characteristics are important, but it is the fifth characteristic that makes play so intriguing.

5. Play has certain systematic relations to what is not play (Garvey, 1990, p. 4).

The role or association that play has with such phenomena as creativity, problem solving, and language learning is the reason play continues to be studied. Play is also studied because of its connection with and support of the development of social/emotional and cognitive skills (Garvey, 1990). In this research, I observed play at various literacy centers and will discuss the ways in which play is utilized as a tool for developing language skills and a peer culture.
Language Play with Rhyming Objects

At the word zone literacy center, Mrs. Katola made available a group of 20 small objects with which the children could create 10 rhyming pairs. The objects included a van, fan, mouse, house, bat, hat, whale, scale, pear, chair, shell, bell, frog, log, plane, train, snake, cake, bug, and mug. Play with the items varied, with some children using the objects as toys for pretend play, and others using them as tools for creating rhyming stories while engaged in language play.

Steve used the rhyming objects for play. He emptied the containers that held various manipulatives used at the word zone center and arranged the containers to create a zoo for the snake, whale, bat, frog, bug, and bat. Steve was actively engaged and finding pleasure in an intrinsically motivated, spontaneous, freely chosen activity. While he played with the objects, he utilized his cognitive skills to differentiate between which objects needed a home and which objects did not need a home. When I walked past the area, Steve shared what he had accomplished. Realizing that he had left over objects, he quickly demonstrated problem solving techniques. He pointed to the non-animal objects and solved the problem of leftover objects by stating, “Those things there. Those are toys for the animals.” In this circumstance, Steve had played with the objects without thinking about their rhyming attributes.

In this first illustration, Steve was engaged in just exploring the characteristics of the objects, a type of play that I observed several times at the word zone literacy center. We cannot even be sure whether Steve understood that the objects were to make rhymes. Missing from his interaction with the objects is a peer and one can only wonder whether interaction with a peer would have supported his development of rhyming skills.
In another interaction with the rhyming objects, David and Nick played with the rhyming objects and used them to create rhymes. However, when David says, “Look a plane, wheee”, Nick responds “Let’s mix them again,” supporting him by helping him stay on task. They mix the objects together so they can again find the rhyming pairs. As they match the objects, they continue to play by making sounds and telling stories with the objects.

David: “Van – fan. Where’s the van with the fan? Watch out – eeeecck!”

[The bell rings and they pretend that the snake is eating the cake. This prompts David to create roles for each of them.]

David: “When the bell rings, you get that bug.” [He then rings the bell and Nick acts like a bug.]

(November 2, 2005)

This play is different than what Steve experienced, as it involves two children who are playing together, even assigning roles to each other as they play. Although they are engaged in play with the objects, the play vacillates between play with the objects and play with the function of the objects. However, their play demonstrates a deeper understanding of the purpose of the objects than what Steve displayed.

In this next scene, Tina and Zachary are sorting the objects to make rhyming pairs while engaged in a distinctive type of social play using language. According to Garvey (1990), there are three types of social play with language: spontaneous rhyming and word play; play with fantasy and nonsense; and play with speech acts and discourse conventions. Even though Garvey discussed social play in preschool age children, the interaction between Zachary and Tina demonstrated spontaneous rhyming and word play.
– a type of language play in which the rhyming of language is the play. This social play with language is freely chosen, intrinsically motivated, enjoyable, and demonstrates active engagement with the objects.

Zachary: “I going to start the car.”

Zachary: “I was standing at the train.”

Tina: “Fan/bat.”

Tina: “Plane/train.”

(October 3, 2005)

They work quietly, putting rhyming objects together until they have a pile of objects that are not as easy to rhyme. This could be because they do not know the names of all of the objects.

Tina: “Shell. Mug.”

Zachary: “Clock/ block”

Tina: “Quu – No.”

Zachary: “Bat/ hat.”

Tina: “Wait, key goes with seat. /se/ /e/ No.”

Unknown: “/ke/ - /eat/ /chair/.”

Tina: “Whale, shell.”

Zachary: “Yeah.”

Tina: “Whale, shell – whale/shell. No they don’t.”

Zachary: “Bat/hat.”

Tina: “Bat/hat, yeah.”

Zachary: “Bug, bug/mug.”
Tina: “Fan goes with van.”
Zachary: “Shouldn’t there be a w or something?”
Tina: “Pig, hair. No.”
Tina: “Hand.”
Zachary: “Frog/ log. The frog hops up on the log.”
Tina: “Wait.”
Zachary: “What’s this?”
Tina: “Clock.”
Zachary: “Clock / block.”
Tina: “I don’t think that’s a clock.”
Zachary: “What is this?”
Tina: “Scale.”
Zachary: “Scale?”
Tina: “Scale - scale/whale” [very excited.]
Tina: “Block and clock.”
Zachary holds up the scale: “I thought this was a clock.”
Tina: “What is it again? What is it again?”
Zachary: “Scale.”
Tina: “Uhmmm, chair.”
Zachary: “Pear.”
Tina: “Wait, chair/pear. Yeah. And the chair sat on.”
Tina and Zachary: “The pear sits on the chair.”
Tina: “The chair sat on the pear. The pear sat on the chair.”
Zachary: “Plane/train”
Tina: “I don’t know what we’re going to do”
Tina: “Chain”
Zachary: “Don’t forget dogs name”
Zachary: “Wait a minute.”
Tina: “What?”
Zachary: “Shouldn’t it be rake?”
Tina: “Rake/bell – rake/cake, but there’s no rake”
Tina: “Shell, we did that again, whale.”
Zachary: “Wait, shell/ bell.”
Tina: “yeah,”
Zachary: “No, not the pear rolls off the chair.”
Tina: “cake.”
Zachary: “snake.”
Tina: “Yeah.”
Zachary: “We did it!” We found everything!” singing voice
Tina: “Yeah!”
Zachary: “Let’s make sounds out of them.”
Tina: “The frog sits on the log”
Zachary: “The plane lands on the train.”
Tina: “The plane plays on the train.”
Zachary: “Wait, The plane lands on the train. And the pear sitting on the chair, the
mouse attacking the house, a snake eating a cake, a bell hiding in a shell, a bug hiding in a mug, a whale -what are these?"

Tina: “Scale”

Tina: “A bat wearing a hat.”

Laughter by both Tina and Zachary.

Unknown: “Now try everything”

Tina: “Have everything like this, okay. We put them all in a line then we’ll think of.”

Zachary: “A bat wearing a hat.”

Tina: “Okay, over here, let’s have a bat wearing a hat.”

Zachary: “Bat, come over here with your hat”

Tina: “No, not there, you’ll be…”

Zachary: “What about the whale standing on a scale.”

Zachary: “The bell hiding in the shell”

Tina: “Okay, actually, the….

Tina: “The frog sitting on a log”

Zachary: “The plane flying over the train,

Tina: “No, plane crashing on the train”

Tina: “Bug hiding in a mug”

Zachary: “How about I do that one, you do that one, I’ll do that one.”

Tina: “Yeah, and …”

Zachary: “That …”

Confusion as they try to figure it out. Then Tina sings each rhyme.
Tina: “A fan cooling off the van.”

Tina: “Chair, pear sitting on a chair.”

Tina: “A mouse attacking a house.”

Tina: “A bell hiding in a shell.”

Zachary: “We did everything!”

Tina in excited voice: “Yeah, we now get to do some spelling words, come on.”

(November 3, 2005)

As Tina and Zachary work together, they support and scaffold each other’s learning.

When Zachary asks for the name of an object, Tina responds, “clock.” Zachary tries to rhyme a word with clock by saying “block.” Tina realizes her mistake and states, “I don’t think that’s a clock.” Zachary asks the questions again: “What is this?” and Tina responds “scale,” then excitedly puts two objects together and says the rhyme, “scale, whale.”

After Tina and Zachary identified all of the objects and put them in pairs together, they engaged in language play or what Halliday (1973) refers to an imaginative function of language. The objects were only minor props in their play, while the rhyme and silliness of the stories were the major components of the play. Together, through peer interactions, they came to understand the functions of the objects and mastered the task of matching the rhyming pairs. Once this happened, they began to create silly language stories, participating in language play.

Play with the rhyming objects followed three paths. First, Steve played with the objects to create an imaginary world, unaware of the rhyming attributes of the objects. David and Nick played with the rhyming objects, fluctuating between play with the objects and play with the rhyming of the objects. When one would engage in play, the
other would bring the interaction back to the intended task of the rhyming objects. Lastly, the interactions between Tina and Zachary were used to support language play with rhyming words situated in a social world. Even though the play looked different in each of these scenarios, it was a catalyst for cognitive and social growth, as well as a way to strengthen the peer culture.

Language Play with Spelling Words

In this classroom, the teacher did not give the class a set of spelling words on Monday morning with spelling assignments given out each day, leading to a final assessment on Friday. Instead, each child had a spelling list that he/she was to work on. Children at the word zone literacy center could choose from a myriad of activities. One choice was to quiz each other on their unique spelling lists as part of their time at the word zone. This practice allowed for language play, while the children practiced spelling words. In Garvey’s (1990) description of play with conversation, children engaged in discourse that purposely misnamed items to create humor.

This same action was displayed in this first grade classroom when Zachary and Tina practiced spelling together. Tina is saying a word and Zachary is spelling it out loud. Tina will then agree with Zachary’s spelling of the word or will correct his spelling.

Tina: “Ready, Cane.”
Zachary: “C, A, N, E.”
Tina: “Make.”
Zachary: “M, A, C.”
Tina: “No, M, A, K, E.”
Zachary: “I stink them up.”
Tina: “of”

Zachary: “I can’t spell”

Tina: “Try /u/, I mean spell of”

Zachary: “Can’t hear.”

Tina: “O, F.”

Zachary: “See what I mean.”

Tina: “Sit”

Zachary: “S, I, T.”

Tina: “Right. Into”

Zachary: “I, N, T, O.”

Tina: “Right”

Zachary: “It was?”

Tina: “Yeah.”

Zachary: “W, A, S.”

Tina: “That’s not a word”

Zachary: “I was kidding. I knew it was wrong.”

Tina: “Okay, Now you have to do it.”

(November 21, 2005)

They switch tasks. Zachary is asking the words, and Tina is spelling the words.

Zachary: “Make.”

Tina: “M, A, K, E.”

Zachary: “Wrong. Of”

Tina: “O, F.”
As Tina and Zachary carried out a literacy task, they engaged in language play by creating a discourse of pretending improper spellings to create humor. By allowing children to engage in freely chosen, intrinsically motivated, enjoyable tasks, the teacher has set the environment to allow for engagement with language play. In addition, she has allowed an environment that supports children in creating a world in which they are in control – a peer culture.

*Language Play with Reading*

In this first-grade classroom, children had many opportunities to engage in reading a text together, either during Buddy Reading time or at the various literacy centers. This task allowed for language play, described by Garvey (1990) as language providing sound effects or created by changing the articulation of the speech. Again,
Garvey is describing the language play of younger children, but I observed many examples of this kind of play with language in this first-grade classroom, as the children interacted with a text.

This is demonstrated when Zachary reads, “Bear went into the cave and slept” and then makes snoring noises, and when David chooses a book while speaking with a high pitched, funny voice, “Uhm, I think I would like to pick uhm, oh Mrs. Wishy Washy,” or when Zachary reads, “One day mom took Tracy to the falls. ‘Help, help!’ cried Tracy. ‘Help, help! I’m falling’,,” while making his voice fall in pitch, and continues, “Mom rushed to save her, but Tracy was only tricking.”

Another type of language play is when children step into the role of the character of the book, as when Steve takes on the characteristics of Minerva Louise. Sarah and Steve were there listening to the book, *A Hat for Minerva Louise* (Stoeke, 1997). When I arrived, Sarah explained that Steve was acting like a chicken. Steve agreed that he was making chicken noises. Inspired by the book, he explained, “This book is so funny.” He then demonstrated how to act like a chicken. This type of behavior is different than the language play that we saw demonstrated by a change in voice inflection or pitch. When Steve creates actions to represent meaning, the scene resembles the type of peer interaction that Bodrova and Leong (1996) labeled play. Furthermore, Steve had used the imaginative function of language defined by Halliday (1973) to create an imaginary world.

**Summary of Peer Interactions at Literacy Centers**

This study focused on three research questions. The first question, How does peer dialogue at literacy centers and an art center in this first-grade classroom support
children’s literacy learning? This question was explored in two ways. First I examined how autonomous literacy skills were learned with peer dialogue by looking at how the first-grade literacy indicators in the Ohio Academic Content Standards were met while children interacted together at literacy centers. It was determined that 47 of the 79 indicators were addressed when children were talking, working, and sharing in pairs or small groups at literacy centers. In the second part of the discussion, I looked at how children learn the procedures and roles for using literacy by exploring peer dialogue.

The second question, What types of peer interactions do children engage in as they interact with peers at literacy centers? discusses the types of peer interactions that children engage in as they interact with peers at literacy centers. The peer interactions were categorized for analysis in the following way: (a) to affiliate with the community, (b) to develop cultural phrases and share cultural meanings, (b) to manipulate their others, (d) to solve problems, and (e) to play with language. Even though the peer interactions have been categorized in this way, foundationally, the peer interactions supported children in creating a peer culture in a social world. With freedom to discuss, share, and question life, the children had opportunity to encounter a literacy world in interesting and complex ways. Children had opportunities to use literacy and engage in literacy practices to become literate beings in a social world.

*Use of Psychological Tools*

The third question of this study was how do children create and use artifacts as psychological tools to promote their literacy learning? Psychological tools (Vygotsky, 1978), or those maps, pictures, symbols, gestures that we use to mediate knowledge from the inter-personal level (social plane) to the intra-personal (psychological plane), were
demonstrated in various ways in this study. Children sang songs, played games, and used gestures to mediate higher level mental functions, such as logical thinking, memory, and perception. Several examples have already been shared in this chapter as when children used the alphabet song to support them in the task of putting the letters of the alphabet in order or using the socially-constructed game “thumb wars” to solve a problem. In addition, children used gestures while reading to mediate deeper understanding of text. When David and Steve were reading a book together, David instructed Steve to read with his mouth wide open to demonstrate the written text.

Steve reads: “When along came a butterfly. ‘What are you?’ asked the wide-mouthed frog. What are you? I am a wide mouthed frog and I eat butterflies. Gulp”.

David: “When you say like this. I’m a WIDE MOUTH frog. (showing him a wide mouth).”

Steve reads: Along came a grasshopper. ‘What are you,” asked the wide mouth frog. ‘I a grasshopper,’ said the grasshopper. What are you?”

Steve and Devon: “I am a WIDE MOUTH frog”

Steve: “and I eat grasshoppers. Gulp.”

Steve: “Along came a snake. ‘What are you?’ asked the wide mouth frog. I’m a snake and I eat wide mouth frogs. Are you a wide mouth frog? Oh, no croaked the wide mouth frog. You can’t find them around anymore.” [Both Steve and David laugh.]

(January 11, 2006)
By making a facial gesture, Steve and David demonstrated via the use of a symbol that they understood the written text. This psychological tool was used to mediate comprehension, and also as a form of language play.

Psychological tools come in many forms, (i.e., verbal sayings, actions, gestures, graphic organizers) and mediate lower mental functions to higher mental function (Vygotsky, 1978).

In this first-grade classroom, children had abundant opportunities for peer dialogue as they interacted at literacy centers. Not only did children learn autonomous literacy behaviors as outlined by the first-grade indicators of the Ohio Academic Content Standards, but the interactions with literacy materials, art supplies, and peers allowed children to understand the who, what, how, and when to use literacy in a social community.

Peer Dialogue at the Art Center

The last section of this chapter will specifically focus on the art center as a provocation for peer dialogue in response to the portion of the research question concerning how the art center supports literacy learning in this first-grade classroom. When children work together at the art center, they have many opportunities to engage in peer interactions, many of which were included in the examples previously discussed in this chapter. Furthermore, the analyses of the types of peer interactions in which children engage at the art center were congruent with the types of dialogue heard at the various literacy centers in the classroom: children solve problems, use language to play with objects, manipulate others, develop social phrases and cultural practices, and find ways to become a part of the community as they engage in a peer culture.
Even though literacy activity is present at the art center, the skills developed from peer interactions are somewhat different than the literacy practices at other literacy centers. For example, at this art center children spent a lot of time illustrating text and focusing on the pictures in text. They used books as a resource to complete tasks such as creating animal collages, illustrating text, and representing ideas with paint. At other literacy centers, especially word zone and book nook, children discussed letter sounds, read texts, made words, and found rhymes. All of these skills are necessary for a well-rounded literacy program, demonstrating a need to have both traditional centers and an art center available for children.

Furthermore, there was not a high correlation between the literacy behaviors observed at the art center and the first-grade indicators from the Ohio Academic Content Standards. Out of the 79 first-grade indicators, there were two literacy behaviors at the art center that consistently matched a literacy indicator. They included “Standard 3: Indicator 3 – Visualize the information in texts and demonstrates this by drawing pictures, discussing images in texts or writing simple descriptions, and Standard 5: Indicator 1, – Provide own interpretation of story, using information from the text” (ODE, 2001. p. 183). Also, some indicators to support the acquisition of vocabulary were demonstrated, but not any one indicator was prominent. Interestingly, many of the indicators met at the art center were not observed at the traditional literacy centers. Since the two types of centers were both used, they created an opportunity for more comprehensive literacy behaviors in this first-grade classroom.

More common at the art center, were tasks that allowed children to engage in planning, looking for details in texts, and delighting in their work. A common task at the
art center was to create an image from an Eric Carle book, which provided much
discussion about the images from the text and how to replicate them. Steve and Rick are
at the art center looking through the book *Eric Carle’s Animals, Animals* (Carle, 1989)
trying to find an animal to use as a guide for the collage. After an animal is found, the
children are to cut painted paper into the shapes needed to create an animal collage. Steve
becomes very excited when he finds and decides to make a dragon. He then gets a piece
of drawing paper and moves to the art table. After drawing an animal, he goes back to the
cabinet to get a piece of painted paper.

Steve: “You want to see what I’m making?”

Erin: “I made this one.”

Unknown child: “And I did this one.”

Erin: “Are you sure because it has o, x. I know I did this one because
look, I remember this”

Steve continues to cut out pieces to fit his drawing.

Erin: “That doesn’t look like this.”

Steve: “Well, makin it the way I want it”

Erin: “You forgot to make the tail.”

Steve: [points to the drawing] “I got it.”

Erin walks away.

Rick [chanting as he dances around looking at Steve’s pictures]: “Chi, cha. Chi,
chi, chi cha.” [Then he walks away and brings over the Eric Carle book.]

Rick: “Does this help you? Little feet, tail, head, body, neck.”

Steve: “This is my way.”
Rick watches him.

Erin: “Are you going to make yours like this?”

Rick: “Yeah, I need a book” [He leaves the camera and goes to get a different book.]

Rick: “Awesome, Steve.”

Steve: “Yep, look!”

Steve: “Rick, Rick, look. Look at that Rick.”

Steve then takes the pencil and writes his name on it.

Steve: “Look, look.” [he says to a person passing by.]

(November 21, 2005)

In this interaction, we see that children plan what they are going to do:

[Steve then gets a piece of drawing paper and moves to the art table. He is drawing a picture of something. After drawing an animal, he goes back to the cabinet to get a piece of painted paper.]

Steve: “You want to see what I’m making?”

(November 21, 2005)

Children share their accomplishments with one another:

Steve: “You want to see what I’m making?”

Erin: “I made this one.”

Unknown child: “And I did this one.”

(November 21, 2005)

Children offer help to one another:

Erin: “That doesn’t look like this”
Steve: “Well, makin it the way I want it.”
Erin: “You forgot to make the tail.”
Steve: [points to the drawing] “I got it.”
Erin walks away.
Rick [chanting as he dances around looking at Steve’s pictures]: “Chi, cha. Chi, chi, chi cha.” [Then he walks away.]
Rick brings over the Eric Carle book.
Rick: “Does this help you? Little feet, tail, head, body, neck.”
(November 21, 2005)
They confirm each other:
Rick: “Awesome Steve.”
Steve: “Yep, look!”
(November 21, 2005)
They look for details:
Rick: “Yeah, I need a book.” [He leaves the camera and goes to get a different book.]
(November 21, 2005)
Finally, children develop industry:
Steve: “Yep, look!”
Steve: “Rick, Rick, look. Look at that Rick.”
Steve then takes the pencil and writes his name on it.
Steve: “Look, look.” [He says to a person passing by.]
(November 21, 2005)
In the previous examples, children are engaged in the same types of peer dialogue at the art center as they employ at various other literacy centers (e.g., offer help to each other, announce what they are going to do, and show pride in what they accomplish). Even though it may seem as if many of the autonomous literacy skills that are in the first-grade indicators from the Academic Content Standards for English Language are sparsely met at the art center, the children learn proficiencies in many activities at this center. They learn to plan what to do, look at details to create representations, and experiment with paint and other media. These skills are critical for children as they learn to represent their thoughts via symbols (language) and create meaning. These same skills are needed for written language as well; planning what to write, adding details to narratives, experimenting with words to add descriptions. The interactions at the art center provided skills needed for literacies other than “autonomous” skills associated with print.

However, children can shift thinking from one sign system to another, or “transmediate” (Owocki, 2001, p. 49). I do not want to value reading and writing as the literacy of all literacies, but by allowing children multiple sign systems, we can strengthen the written sign system.

**Children’s Perspective of the Literacy Centers**

To consider the children’s perspective of literacy centers, I asked the students in this first-grade classroom to participate individually in a short interview regarding their thoughts about literacy centers (Appendix A). Questions included the children’s opinions concerning their favorite and least favorite centers, their preference to either work alone or with others, their thoughts about why Mrs. Katola had them participate in literacy centers, and what they learned from others or taught others while participating at each
center. The next section will provide a glimpse of the classroom literacy centers as seen through the eyes of children.

Nineteen children participated in this research study and all nineteen contributed to the interview process; however, not every child responded to each question. Children met with the researcher individually in the hallway to participate in the interview. An audio recorder was used to capture the words of the children. As well, written notes were made on the children’s responses and actions during the interview.

The first question asked, “Which literacy center is your favorite? As can be seen in the following chart, an overwhelming 79% said that the art center was their favorite center. Reasons consistently included that they like to make pictures and paint. Some even stated that they think they are good at art, that they are a great artist, and that they get ideas from their head.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Center</th>
<th>Number of Children Responding</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art Center</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Zone</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Nook</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Favorite literacy center

Then children were asked if they preferred to work alone or with others while at literacy centers.
Do you like to work by yourself or with other people at the centers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: Work preferences at literacy centers

The majority (68%) said they preferred to work with others. In reply to one child who responded that he/she would rather “Work with others,” I posed a follow-up question: “Why is that?” The child responded, “Because it’s much more fun to play with others instead of playing with yourself, because there’s not much to do with yourself.” Here, the word ‘play’ was interchanged with the word ‘work’. Even without explicitly stating his thoughts, I think the word choice ‘play’ captured what many children thought they were doing at the literacy centers. In this group of children, 16% stated that they like to work by themselves and interestingly, 16% varied in their preference, one even stating, “Sometimes I like somebody to help me and sometimes I don’t.”

Next, the children were asked whether others taught them things at the literacy centers.
When asked if others ever taught them information at the literacy centers, 66% agreed that others taught them something at the centers, but only a few could offer responses to what it is that others taught them. Those responses included spelling words, help at the listening center, how to read books, sharing, respecting people, and being nice. The other 33% responded that other do not teach them anything. One child boldly stated: “I know everything already. All them needs help learning everything.”

The children were also asked whether they taught other children things at the literacy centers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Center</th>
<th>Number of Children Responding</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>66.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>99.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4: Others teach me things at the literacy centers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Center</th>
<th>Number of Children Responding</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5: Do you teach others at literacy centers
The majority of the children do think that they teach other children things at the literacy centers, including spelling words, counting money, and ‘stuff.’ It seemed difficult for children to verbalize what they taught others; however, one child stated, “That you can have friends and friends are nice and they play with you and they help you with stuff.”

Children’s thoughts about why Mrs. Katola had them participate at literacy centers included reading, spelling, learning, “stuff,” having fun, practicing being a teacher, and being a better artist. Finally, children were asked what they would change at the literacy centers. The responses varied, but the majority wanted to change the listening center. Interestingly, the listening center is the literacy center with the least peer interactions taking place. One girl declared that she would change the art center to a book art center. When asked what that would look like, she responded, “It would look like an art center where you can make books and we can paint pictures like artists and then we get to write the words.” Children were given the final words in the interview when they were asked whether there was anything else they would like to tell me about the literacy centers. One girl’s words summed up the thoughts of many children. She stated: “They’re fun. They’re really, really fun!”

**Conclusion**

This chapter has served to review the raw data collected in a first-grade classroom in a small, rural district located in Central Ohio in relationship to the questions guiding the study. First, an in-depth look at the environment helped describe the setting in which the study took place. Analyzing the dialogue between peers while at literacy centers, 5 types of peer interactions were identified. Examples of each type of peer interactions
were presented with samples of peer dialogue to support its designation. Psychological
tools that children used were also detailed to help us see how children are socially
constructing and using artifacts to lead to higher mental functions. I used the Ohio
Academic Content Standards for English Language Arts and the first grade indicators for
each standard to assist in answering the question, how does the peer dialogue of this
group of first-grade children at literacy centers support literacy learning? Finally, an
interview with the each child helped me to focus on what the children thought the role of
literacy centers were in the classroom.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Near the end of the study, each child was given the opportunity to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher regarding his/her thoughts about literacy centers. At the conclusion of the interview, each child was asked if there was anything else he/she would like to comment on regarding literacy centers. One young girl’s words summed up the thoughts of many children. Her face brightened and she stated: “They’re fun. They’re really, really fun!”

Purpose of Research Study

Knowing that literacy centers are fun is encouraging; however, it is more beneficial to examine the influence of literacy centers in a first-grade classroom on literacy learning. Why are literacy centers found in the rooms of so many successful teachers? Pressley, Rankin, and Yokoi (2000) remind us that 100% of kindergarten, 85% of first-grade, and 73% of second-grade primary teachers in the United States who were nominated as effective in promoting literacy reported using learning centers. This study examined how peer dialogue at literacy centers and an art center in this particular first-grade classroom supported children’s literacy learning.
First introduced by Montessori in the early 1900’s, learning centers have been used for many years in various ways, including providing the child support at his/her point of development to support his/her capabilities (Montessori, 1912, 1973). After being used in Montessori programs for years, learning centers gained popularity in the 1970’s with the open classroom movement and were used to motivate, differentiate, and enrich learning (Thomas, 1975, Voight, 1975). Currently, learning centers that are designated to support literacy learning are typically called literacy centers (Morrow, 2002) and are used today by teachers to meet the diverse needs of students. Even though an oft reported advantage to using literacy centers is to “give teachers large blocks of uninterrupted time to work with small groups of children” (Marriott, et.al., 1997, p. 3), Diller (2003) takes a more sociocultural view of literacy learning and is encouraging teachers to create literacy centers to support children’s understanding of literacy. This study supports that view.

To date, little research has been done on the peer dialogue that transpires at literacy centers, and how that dialogue supports literacy learning. Morrow and Weinstein (1986), Sharkey (1992), Wells-Rowe (1994), and more recently Tolentino (2004) have looked at benefits of literacy centers; however, most of the previous work has included adult interactions. This study has very little adult dialogue, but rather focuses on peer dialogue and how that dialogue supports literacy learning.

In chapter four, I used the data to examine how peer dialogue supported literacy learning and the types of peer dialogue that children engaged in. This chapter is more than a summary of how the analyzed data answered each question posed by the researcher or a review of chapter four; but rather a discussion of key findings about using
literacy centers in a first-grade classroom. This chapter provides a way to redefine the use of literacy centers in early childhood classrooms.

**Social Worlds of Children**

When children enter school, they enter an official school world (Dyson, 1993) ruled by adults with tests, activities, and schedules that fit the needs of school. The school world is filled with standards, tests, worksheets for children to complete and skills to master. If you were to ask the “man on the street” to define school, he/she would probably state that it is a place where one goes to learn how to read and write and do math. When asked to elaborate, terms like tests, projects, and writing papers would be used to describe the activities of school. In the official social world of school, “autonomous” literacy (Street, 1995) is prevalent and is comprised of learning the skills that allow one to read and write. Autonomous literacy separates the skills from any cultural or social context for using literacy. Legislators and political systems highly regard these discrete skills as necessary for literacy success and have created standards of performance on these skills for children at each year of school. In Ohio, these are called the Ohio Academic Content Standards for English Language Arts. These standards are broken down into 79 indicators of literacy skills for which children in first-grade are expected to achieve some level of competence on by the completion of first grade. A school goal is to have each child learn to read and write at a certain level and to accomplish that goal, teachers dedicate large blocks of time each day to the teaching and learning of literacy skills. This way of viewing literacy learning situates literacy as an object to be learned rather than a way to use literacy in social practices (Hall, 1998).
However, in each classroom, there is also an unofficial school world (Dyson, 1993) where jointly children construct a peer culture (Corsaro, 1985; Kantor, Elgas, & Fernie, 1993). In that peer culture, children want to gain control (Corsaro, 1985) and share control with each other. They are engaged in activity that the teacher may be completely unaware of as they construct an identity for themselves and “declare themselves as members of the society of children” (Dyson, 1997, p. 29).

This study focused on the dialogue that transpired when these two social worlds in which children engage in intersected. When the official school world, filled with school literacy tasks, were presented at literacy centers where children were free from adult interactions, a space was created that allowed a peer culture to be constructed and for peer dialogue to flourish and support literacy learning. Children had opportunities to talk (or not talk) during the time provided for literacy centers. Even though each child had a prescribed task to accomplish for the day, there was ample time for children to create a social world without adult interaction. Children played, sang, and participated in literacy events, using dialogue and materials to build cultural models of how to ‘do’ literacy in specific types of events (Rowe, 2008). These types of interactions supported the understanding that literacy is more than a set of learned skills, but rather a way to use literacy in a literate society (Street, 1995).

The literacy centers became the space for peer-to-peer social interactions and allowed children to engage in literacy events. Children had a chance to share ideas, thoughts, and understandings on a social-plane with their peers and then to construct understandings on an intrapersonal-plane (Vygotsky, 1978). Using sociocultural theory as a framework, this study focused on describing how first-grade children’s literacy
knowledge - both autonomous skills and ideological literacies (Street, 1995) - is socially negotiated through peer dialogue at literacy centers and an art center. When these two social worlds intersect children can support each other in learning literacy skills. Through dialogue, children can gain control of and use literacy events for creating an identity and declaring themselves members of a society. In this chapter, I do more than identify the types of dialogue at each center, but discuss how peer dialogue supported literacy learning.

**Key Finding: Peer Dialogue Supports Literacy Learning**

Historically, talk between peers in schools has rarely been used, rather has been seen as disruptive to classrooms (Mercer, 1995). Vygotsky (1978) has challenged this thinking as he posits that social interaction is at the core of learning. First, ideas are shared on a social plane between two or more people and then internalized by individuals (Vygotsky, 1978) supporting the role of peer dialogue for learning. Vygotsky (1978) further states that when a learner interacts with a more knowledgeable other, he/she can actually perform better than if working on a task alone. This was demonstrated in this study. When children worked together on official school tasks, some struggled with the ideas and concepts of print, while others succeeded and shared their understandings. Peers supported each other in constructing literacy knowledge in the following ways: 1) One child would tell another child a literacy skill; 2) A child would scaffold another child’s understanding; and 3) Children would construct shared meaning together. Following is a closer look at each of these ways in which peer dialogue supported literacy learning.
One Child Tells Another Child The Answer:

One common, but direct way for children to support each other in literacy learning was for one child to tell another child an answer. When one child would say a word incorrectly, struggle while reading aloud, or ask for help on a literacy task, many times the second child would just tell or share the correct answer with his/her peer. It was common to hear “What is this word?” as a child would ask a peer for help. If the child who was asked knew the answer, many times he/she would simply tell the child the correct answer.

Sometimes, the child who needed the support did not ask because he/she did not know that he needed assistance. Nick is reading a text about crocodiles and seagulls when he mispronounces the word seagulls. At first, the child questions him and then tells him the correct pronunciation. Once Nick repeats the word correctly, the child reinforces the correct pronunciation by stating that it is “not soguys.”

One Child: “Did you say seagulls?”

Nick: “Soguys”

Zachary: “What?”

Nick: “Soguys”

One Child: “They’re seagulls.”

Nick: “Seagulls.”

One Child: “Not soguys”

(January 25, 2006).
Sharing an answer with another peer was a common way for children to use peer dialogue to support literacy learning. In this case, Nick did not know he needed support, but his peer proactively shared the correct pronunciation with him.

Another common question was, “what does that mean?” which was asked when a child would use a word that the peer did not know. There were many examples that demonstrated children were learning new vocabulary through peer interactions; however, using new words in context was not listed as a first-grade indicator. Interestingly, when the Ohio Academic Content Standards for English Language Arts book describes vocabulary skills, it points out that children learn new vocabulary via discussion with peers and adults; but, as I looked closely at the indicators, I realized that an indicator that described learning vocabulary from peers was not included. The indicators are written as behaviors that can be measured with a paper/pencil assessment and learning vocabulary words from peers is not an easy task to measure with a written test. That may be why it has been left out of the highly utilized content standards. However, it is important to note that peer dialogue supported children in learning new vocabulary. A word would be used on a social plane when a more knowledgeable child would use the word. Then he/she would share the definition, thus leading the second child’s construction of the vocabulary. This type of interaction would also lead the first child’s understanding as he/she had to have a strong understanding of the word to be able to explain it. Interestingly, being asked to share the definition of a word supported the user in constructing a deeper understanding of the word. For example, when Zachary told Tina that she had picked the “slimed” brush, Tina asked him what he meant. When he tried to share his understanding
of the word slimed, he had difficulty and had to explain a situation instead of providing a definition.

Zachary: “One time I got that one and the green got stuck to my brush.”

(October 26, 2005)

Peer dialogue supported literacy learning when one child would directly tell another child the answer to a question or share a concept proactively.

One Child Scaffolds Another Child’s Understanding

In addition, children supported each other in learning literacy by responding to another’s inquiry with leading questions and supportive prompts. This was observed when one child would ask a question to a more knowledgeable child. The second child would offer support by leading the first child in the first child’s zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). When two girls were reading a page in the Star of the Week class book about their peer Maggie, they were stuck on the name of Maggie’s sister and they went to Maggie to ask for help. Maggie could have easily responded with her sister’s name, but instead, she asked leading questions about letter/sound relationships to support the girls in stretching out the name of her sister. As the two girls completed the task, Maggie provided an external reward by telling them “Good job” (December 5, 2005).

Children offered support to help a second child learn literacy, demonstrated when Zachary told Nick, “Just pretend you are talking to me” to help him read more fluently (January 25, 2005). Likewise, when a peer is having difficulty, Steve states his willingness to help his friend with the worksheet. Instead of telling him/her the answers, he supports the peer by asking questions and stretching out the sounds. The object is to
determine if the vowel is long or short. The first word is twist, the second word is girl, and the third word is kite.

Steve: “I’ll help you”

Steve: “Okay, what is it. /twi/ /twist/?”

Child: “twist”

Child: “/gir/ /gir/ oh, er, girl. What is this one?”

Steve: “/g/ /r/ /er/ /i/” [He is trying to lead the child by making a short I sound.]

Child: “Green”

Steve: “Short vowel.”

Child: “This one goes right here?” [Does the child really know why it is a short vowel?]

[They work in silence.]

Child: “/en/ /ee/ /ki/ /k/ /it/ /kite/ kite, kite, kite. Is it short or long? Short or long?”

Steve: “What does it sound like?”

Child: “It’s a long I”

(February 18, 2006)

Steve is using the strategies that resemble those of a teacher. He prompts the child by asking a question that will support the construction of the skill. Notice, that when the child mistakes the word ‘girl’ by stating ‘green’, Steve tells the child the answer. I wonder if it is because Steve no longer knows how to provide a prompt to scaffold his peer in that task. Many times, a more knowledgeable child would scaffold another child’s skills to allow him/her to accomplish a task that he/she could not accomplish on his/her own.

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Children Construct Shared Meanings

When reading together, children laughed, asked questions, and connected with the text by sharing their own stories to support meaning of the text. When reading in pairs, if the listener responded verbally, it encouraged the reader to add more flair to the reading. Dyson (1993) tells us that “unofficial worlds (are) socially dramatic places” (p. 66). That could be seen as children worked together to create shared understandings of text. While reading, children would add to the text by making up stories about themselves. As one child would describe a situation, the second child would make a bigger story. It is as if the children were creating a collaborative story with the text, but also constructing an identity for themselves in their peer world. David and Steve are reading a text about catching fish. At some point, David declares that he caught a fish in his mouth. In joint story making (Dyson, 1993) children are creating a shared meaning.

David: “I did that before. I caught one in my mouth.”

Steve: “one of these?” [He points to the pelican in the book.]

David: “Yeah the fi-. No a fish.”

Steve: “In your mouth?”

David: “Yeah. It was like a uhh…”

Steve: “Yucky.”

David: “Yeah. It tasted like sea water.”

Steve: “I did that before too. It was an alligator. It was an alligator tail. It’s still there. I did an alligator tail.”

[Devin starts to read]

(January 11, 2006).
In this vignette, children are adding to the text in an imaginative way. When David shares that he caught a fish in his mouth, Steve responds that he did that as well, only it was an alligator, no, an alligator tail and that it is still there. The imaginative joint story created by two boys sharing their imaginative experiences added to the story. The children playfully stepped into the story to become partners in the text.

Many of the dialogues between children involved play. When Vygotsky (1978) spoke of learning to read and write, he stated that “the best method is one in which children do not learn to read and write but in which both these skills are found in play situations” (p. 118). Even though Mrs. Katola had set up literacy centers rather than play areas, the children played when they read together, when they completed worksheets, and when they worked with manipulatives. They used play to engage in made up games involving literacy. In one observed event, two girls were using the overhead projector as a camera. They had laid out all of the name cards and picture cards of the children in the class. They would hold up a name card, flash the projector on and then off, and then lay the picture of the child by the corresponding name card. This activity was filled with pretend and make-believe play. The two girls were fully engaged in a freely chosen and completely child inspired literacy event. Through play children supported each other in literacy learning. In this situation, reading was necessary for the play, a best practice according to Vygotsky (1978).

The opportunity for peers to talk together in this first-grade classroom supported literacy learning. Either 1) one child would “tell” another child a skill or define a word for a second child, 2) a child would scaffold another child’s learning about literacy, or 3) two (or more) children would work or play together to construct shared meanings.
**Key Finding: Environment is Important for Literacy Learning**

The environment in which this study took place was a language-rich environment (Schickendanz, 1986; Morrow, 1985; Justice, 2004). Books, poster, visuals, dialogue, computers, tape-recorders, writing journals, and various literacy manipulatives were used throughout the room. In thinking about the role of the environment, I look to the work of Wells-Rowe (1994), who listed six features of the classroom environment that seemed to support literacy learning. Even though her study asked how young children become literate in a *preschool setting*, there are some significant similarities and it is important to compare her findings with those of this study to build theory about supportive literacy environments. First, I will share her six features, and then share how my findings are similar and different. I will also discuss an additional feature that I found. Wells-Rowe (1994) listed six features: 1) *Conversation, demonstration, and authoring were linked as integral parts of literacy events that were familiar and functional* (p. 199). Children knew that if they did not understand a text, either written or verbal, that they were able to ask. 2) *Participants worked collaboratively to reach shared meanings* (p. 199). Both the author and the audience discussed and shared ideas so that they could read shared understandings. 3) *Participants exchanged roles frequently* (p. 199). Teachers and children each participated as either the author or the audience. 4) *Children participated in peer-dominated literacy events as well as those where adults were present* (p. 199). 5) *Because children were respected as authors by their teachers and peers, they understood that questions and comments about their work were real request for information, not tests of their knowledge* (p. 200). Children were given authentic tasks. 6) *Authoring activities of teachers and children were viewed as demonstrations rather than
models to be copied exactly (p. 200). Children were free to choose what they would use from the teachers contributions and what they would not use. Wells-Rowe (1994) stated that these features supported young children in becoming authors.

My study resonates with many of these findings. Creating an environment for literacy learning is multi-faceted and includes providing opportunities for children to practice being literate with authentic literacy tasks. In addition, children must have sufficient time to interact with both one another and with materials. Finally, literacy centers must be embedded in a language-rich environment. Each of these facets will be explored in this section.

**Provide Opportunities for Authentic Literacy Practices**

To learn literacy children need to have opportunities to use, create, and enjoy authentic literacy tasks. They need to use literacy for real world purposes, or what Street (1985) calls “ideological” literacies. In this model, literacy creates engagement and “is consistently related to the everyday lives of people in their communities” (Hall, 1998, p. 13). For example, in the book nook area, children had the opportunity to read books, put together puzzles, and play school. Often, I observed children reading the *Star of the Week* book, a class created book that included information about each child and his/her family. This one text provided many opportunities for authentic literacy. First, children enjoyed reading and rereading the book. Pairs of children would read it in unison or one child would listen as a second child read the text. Later, Mrs. Katola wrote out questions about a child in the classroom of which the answers could be found in the *Star of the Week* book. Children would read the question and then read through the book to find the answer. Not only was this a literacy activity, but one that children found useful in
creating a peer culture. As a child searched for whose favorite color was purple, he/she would connect with others who had similar likes and dislikes and/or discuss how someone had a unique feature. This classroom activity not only allowed for children to practice literacy skills, but to use literacies in their community.

Children also created their own authentic literacy tasks to become a part of the community. Children created personal notes and passed out phone numbers. Even though this was not the literacy skill of the day, children were using the literacies that were valued in their world to establish a place for oneself in the peer culture. Other literacy events created by the children included sorting the name cards in various ways, reading books to one another while playing school. Some could argue that many of the literacy events that children engaged in were not authentic, as they were tasks for practicing “autonomous” (Street, 1995) literacy skills. However, I believe that when a child has a choice of activity and he/she chooses to put alphabet blocks in order or some other skill driven task, then that event becomes authentic to him/her. For children to have opportunities for this kind of authentic literacy tasks, the environment must allow time for children to have choices to select and have control over what they choose to do.

Provide Time for Authentic Literacy Tasks

In this particular classroom, each child was assigned to only one literacy center each day. At the beginning of the literacy block of time, each child would participate in a 10 minute buddy reading session. Then, after completing the literacy task assigned for that day the child would have the rest of the literacy center time to work on a literacy activity of his/her choice at that literacy center, or what I am calling an authentic literacy task. This was typically 40-50 minutes of the child’s day. Allowing a prolonged length
time was important for several reasons. First, children did not appear to be rushing to complete one task so they could go to another center to complete another task. In addition, the extended time provided an opportunity for children to engage with peers in both dialogue and activity. They had time to explore or read multiple books, find rhyming pairs or categorize name cards. Many times, children would complete a puzzle, just to dump it out and start putting it together all over again or stamp out a list of spelling words and then start looking for more words to write out with the stampers. Because the environment supported a calm and unhurried atmosphere, children had sufficient time to explore, investigate, and discuss their accomplishments with others.

In the following examples, one can see the benefit of having time to work on an activity. One group of children was working on a reader’s theatre presentation. I observed the first and second days of rehearsals. In the first attempt of the play, the children were rather stoic and mechanical. I posit that if they were given the task of working on reader’s theater and then moving to a second or third center, that the group would have read through the dialogue once, maybe twice, and moved to the next activity. However, because children had abundant time over several days to devote to this task, the group read and reread their lines. As each line was read, reread, and reread again, the children added sound effects, poetic details, and artistic flair to their reading. By having time to participate in repeated activity, the children were creating meaning of the event. Their voices became impassioned with feeling and it seemed as if they took on the persona of the character.

Likewise, when two children were creating rhymes out of the small toy objects, they had time to interact with the materials. The work moved from a teacher inspired task
oriented process to a scenario filled with language play. Children moved from finding the rhyming objects “chair” and “pear” to creating rhyming stories about each duo. For example, “The snake ate the cake”, or “The plane landed on the train” were thought up and acted out using the small objects. Children completed the task that was given to them at the center, and then because they had time to do the activity again and again, they expanded and took ownership of the activity, using literacy in real world activities. Once more, the element of time allowed the children to think deeper and create meaning about the literacy task. They were able to use literacies to be a member of their society. I believe this is because they did not feel a need to rush from one activity to another.

Provide a Language-Rich Environment

In the field of early childhood education, much has been written on the benefits of providing a print-rich environment (Hall, 1987; Roskos & Neuman, 2001; Schickendanz, 1986) defined as an environment with posters, alphabet charts, books, labels, and other printed items. Studies have shown that involvement with literacy events in early childhood classrooms is increased when design changes to the early childhood environment include things such as cookbooks, writing tools, and telephone books: items that children typically see outside of the classroom (Hall, 1987). Others have used the terms language-rich and literacy-rich environments (Morrow, 1985). A language-rich environment implies that there is dialogue; however, those verbal interactions have been characterized as high-quality, intentional verbal input between the adult and child (Justice, 2004).

Oral language, especially oral language between peers, has been under-valued as a part of a language-rich environment. Usually descriptions of using verbal language in a
classroom include the teacher reading books to children or asking questions of children. “Under pressure from No Child Left Behind mandates, some early childhood teachers may feel compelled to use direct instruction (‘teacher talk’) more frequently in an attempt to ‘cover the curriculum’” (Kalmar, 2008, p. 88). This can lead to fewer opportunities for children to talk to peers; however, this study finds that it is when children discuss, talk, and interact with peers that learning occurs. A talk-rich environment is an important component in literacy development (Antonacci & O’Callaghan, 2004).

Another reason to provide an environment filled with dialogue is that children construct understanding of concepts when they are listening to peripheral dialogue. When I observed Zachary sitting at the book-nook area, with a dazed look on his face I thought that he was in “his own world”; yet, suddenly, out of his mouth came a profound declaration. He stated/questioned: “Did you know that chunk has a chunk in it?” He was not talking to anyone in particular, but had decided to share this revelation. Later, as I was listening to the audiotape, I discovered that Mrs. Katola was talking about chunks at the reading table. It was in this environment, where children had choices, time, and opportunity to talk and listen, that literacy learning was constructed.

It is important for teachers to provide opportunities for children to wrestle with new concepts, discuss ideas with peers, share significant events from each other’s lives, participate in authentic, self-selected literacy events, and play with language. These opportunities may increase in classrooms where teachers properly utilize and understand literacy centers. This type of environment utilizes “social literacies” (Street, 1995), realizing that there are multiple literacies and children need to learn to use literacy to become a member of society.
When comparing the finding of Wells-Rowe on the environment with my own findings, I see many connections. We both see and value the role of conversation in literacy events, allowing children to work toward shared meanings, providing authentic literacy events, permitting choice in activities, and having peer dominated events. The literacy events in her study were both peer-peer and peer-teacher events. Since I had relatively no peer–teacher interactions, I cannot speak to this finding. However, I would like to supplement her list by positing that allowing long periods of time to work at literacy centers supported children’s literacy learning. Because children did not appear rushed to complete a teacher selected activity, they could stay with one event for a long period of time. The element of time allowed the child to construct and reconstruct ideas.

**Key Finding: Children Create Meaning with Psychological Tools**

Children are meaning-makers (Wells, 1986). They want to make sense of the world in which they live. When visiting China, a difficulty for me was that I did not understand the written language. As we drove past small shops and stores, I could not tell if they were grocery stores or shoe shops as I could not read the signs. In addition, the storefronts did not support my understanding with pictures or logos that I understood. It was very frustrating for me as I wanted to know what everything meant. Children, too, want to know what things mean.

In our current educational climate, legislators, parents, and administrators place a high emphasis on learning literacy skills. For many, this means learning to read and write. As a way to teach and measure this narrow view of literacy, the state of Ohio has created a highly used point of reference: the Ohio Academic Content Standards for English Language Arts. The state mandated indicators aided in the analysis of literacy
learning at literacy centers; however, reading and writing is more than coding and decoding (McLane & McNamee, 1990); but also about creating meaning.

Constructivists posit that learners construct their own knowledge; however, Vygotsky (1978), a social constructivist, believed that we jointly construct knowledge as we talk, work, play, and interact with others on a social level. He posited that “every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first on the social level, and later on the individual level: first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological) (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). It is through “Cooperative dialogues with more knowledgeable members of their society during challenging tasks that … child learn to think and behave in ways that reflect their community’s culture” (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p.19).

Discrete literacy skills, or unconnected elements (i.e. letter/sound relationships), are the foundational blocks for many literacy programs. Pushed by policy makers, legislators, and quantitative studies, a case has been made for literacy to be taught from a bottom-up method, or through the learning and practice of skills such as phonemic awareness and phonics. To master these skills, children are provided opportunities to practice skills via worksheets, games, and other activities.

Most educators know that there is more to reading and writing than implementing skills. Children must have a shared meaning with the author to understand and make sense of what they are reading. Many times, educators ask children to demonstrate an understanding or mastery of a discrete skill, unaware that the child cannot make sense of the written text. This was observed on several occasions when children were asked to
complete a task-oriented worksheet each day as part of the literacy centers. Following is just one example.

Erin was working on a worksheet with the objective of finding rhyming words for various objects. She came to a picture of a pig and was to fill in the missing vowel sound to complete the rhyme. The letters ‘w’ and ‘g’ were on the sides of a blank line [w _ g] that she was to fill in with the appropriate vowel sound. When she was faced with the task of how to complete the worksheet she hesitated because the text did not make sense to her. Through discussion with peers, she completed the task by filling in the letter ‘i’, but it was only after a long discussion about how wig did not make sense. “Pigs don’t have wigs” she stated. For Erin, the answer should have been wag, which made sense to her because “pigs can wag their tails.” In this example, and others, when children worked together with peers, they were able to learn literacy skills and behaviors. Even when children are completing worksheets or other activities that highlight discrete skills, they strive to create meaning.

It is easy for teachers who have mastered literacy to copy a worksheet that seems to allow practice for a literacy skill; however, when we ask children to complete such mundane, out of context, activities, we are often unaware of what they “mean” when they complete the task and therefore we don’t get a true representation of what skills or abilities the child has. In the aforementioned activity, without the insistence of her peers, Erin would have written ‘wag’ instead of ‘wig’. Many times we assume that if we mark an error, we are helping a child to learn the skill; but could it be that we add to a child’s confusion when we do not at least ask him/her why they completed a task a certain way.
How much confusion can a child deal with before he/she learns to just do the task without searching for meaning?

Children use psychological tools to create meaning. Vygotsky (1978) theorized that psychological tools (i.e. symbols, gestures, and language) mediate higher level mental functions (Bodrova & Leong, 1996; Kozulin, 1998). Many psychological tools are in the form of mnemonic devices, socially constructed to support us in the higher mental function of memory. For example, Roy G. Biv is a psychological tool to support one’s memory of the ray of colors in a rainbow – red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. For Vygotsky, the most common and powerful psychological tool to support higher level thought is language. Peer dialogue did support children in learning literacy, but in addition, they utilized many psychological tools other than language.

Psychological tools are socially created to mediate higher level concepts. In this example, Zachary had commented on the way that Tina created a painting by dividing her paper into squares and painting each square a different color. Tina had decided to paint a design for Zachary. The following discussion is a demonstration of how dialogue, and a graphic organizer – a psychological tool, supported Tina in sharing an abstract concept with Zachary. In this dialogue, Zachary does not fully grasp the concept, but his schema (Piaget, 1954) has been challenged.

[Tina painted her square paper into sections by using diagonal lines. She painted one of the sections and then counts the other sections quietly.]

Tina: “Eight, I have eight squares to color.

Zachary: “There’s only 9 colors”

Tina: “Yeah, I’m not using white though”
Zachary: “So you’re using two of two colors.”

Tina: “No, I said I gonna, I have eight, See look, Zachary. I have eight squares, not nine.

Zachary: “And you’re not using white.”

Tina: “Yeah, which there are nine colors.”

Zachary: “So you’re going to use three of one color.”

Tina: “No I’m not. I’m using black and brown.”

Zachary: “Look, one, two, three four five, six, seven, eight, nine.”

Tina: “Watch, one, two, three four five, six, seven, eight, nine. Which I am only going to use eight colors”

Zachary: “Jees, How many are one there?”

Zachary: You’re gonnin need to use one of ..., two of one color. Get it”

Tina: “Never mind. If you see blue on here again, then you will be right. If you don’t see blue on here again then you won’t be right. Because that is where it starts. Blue starts.”

[Tina paints for a while and Zachary is busy doing something else. As Tina is nearing the end of the painting, she again engages Zachary.]

Tina: “I’m right. Look, there are two squares left and only two colors that I’m going to use. And I haven’t used white.”

Zachary: “I don’t get it.”

Tina: “You wouldn’t.”


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[Tina paints the last square.]

Tina: “There, see Zachary. I told you Zachary. I told you it would

work. And look, look what it did. It worked.”

(November 2, 2005)

When Tina could not convey the concept to Zachary with words, she turned to a

psychological tool, or graphic organizer, to support her explanation and Zachary’s

understanding of the concept. The painting was a way for her to demonstrate the

mathematical concept that was causing conflict for Zachary.

Children created and/or used many psychological tools as they interacted with

each other at literacy centers and the art center. Children would sing the alphabet song to

help find letters, paint or draw to share ideas, look at texts to aid memory, use gestures to

support comprehension of texts, play games to problem solve, and the list goes on. It is

important that teachers understand the use of psychological tools in supporting children’s

need to create meaning.

Limitations of Study

This study took place in a small, rural school district located in Central Ohio. The

small population of the study included 19 children, all of which were White. Three were

identified as students with disabilities; however, this was not a factor in the analysis of

data. The teacher, Ms. Katola, was also White and even though her dialogue was not

included in the data, her presence was a factor in setting up the literacy centers and in

managing the classroom. She was a veteran teacher with 24 years of experience. The

research setting could have looked and sounded much different with a teacher of different

gender, color, or experience. The lack of cultural diversity in this study is a limitation.
Since all of the children in the study are white, I do not know what kinds of literacy practices or behaviors children from other cultures would have contributed to the findings. It would be interesting and beneficial to conduct a similar study in an urban and/or culturally diverse classroom. As the population of schools becomes more diverse, it is increasingly important for researchers to conduct studies to consider the literacy practices of more diverse settings.

In addition, the length of the study creates another limitation. Being a naturalistic, qualitative study that used ethnographic methodologies, sixteen weeks of observations is not a long period of time. Furthermore, the study took place in the first half of the year when children were still getting to know each other and the community was forming. The results could have yielded different results if the study was conducted either throughout the year or in the last half of the year instead of the first half of the year.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to learn more about how peer dialogue supports children’s literacy learning in a first-grade classroom when children interact at literacy centers and an art center. Even though many teachers, including Ms. Katola (personal conversation, September, 2006), have reported using learning centers as a way to occupy children while personally involved with small reading groups, analyses showed that children are learning, teaching, and using literacy in authentic practices while engaging with peers and materials at literacy centers.

In this first-grade classroom, literacy centers offered a point of intersection where two social worlds (Dyson, 1993) came together. The official world of school and the unofficial social world of peers overlapped to provide children an opportunity to learn
both the skills associated with “autonomous” literacy and to use literacy in social
practices as associated with “ideological” literacies (Street, 1995). As children
participated at each literacy center, audio and video recording captured the dialogue
between peers. As data were coded, the dialogue between peers demonstrated that 47 of
the 79 indicators of literacy skills were utilized by the children. Children discussed
conventions of written language by reminding each other to add spaces between words
and to capitalize the first letter of their names.

In addition, children used literacy to share autographs, to write notes, to engage in
play, to construct a peer culture, to read books together, to sing, perform, and represent
ideas through the visual arts. Dialogue at literacy centers provided children many
opportunities to use literacy in their peer world.

Impact of This Study

Deborah Wells-Rowe (1994) states that “as teachers, we need to know how
literacy learning occurs so that we can become better observers of our students and better
planners of curricular environments” (p. 196). Hopefully, this study will support teachers
in becoming better planners of curricular environments. “Thinking together is an
important part of life, but it has traditionally been ignored or even repressed in school
(Mercer, 2007, p. 4). Creating literacy centers and then allowing children the time and the
opportunity to work at each center with open ended materials requires a level of trust
from the teacher. He/she must recognize that peer dialogue can and does support children
in learning and using literacy. Literacy centers allow for both “autonomous” and
“ideological” literacies (Street, 1995) to be learned and practiced. According to the data
in this study, children can and do learn the literacy skills needed for reading and writing
and they can and do learn how literacy is used in their environment. This study can add to our growing body of knowledge about how children support each other in learning literacy through peer dialogue. This knowledge is important for both current teachers, legislators, and for teacher candidates. Teacher education programs need to include research in how children create meaning, use literacy, and socially construct learning to prepare a new generation of teachers.

**Further Research**

When coming to the end of an adventure, I like to pause for reflection on the experience and to think about what may come next. The last section is a look forward – a look at what other research could inform and build theory on the use of literacy centers in a first-grade classroom and peer dialogue supports literacy learning.

An intriguing question for me is which literacy centers provide the most opportunities for children to practice and construct literacy? In this particular classroom, Mrs. Katola had four basic literacy centers: word zone; book nook; writing; and listening. In addition, an art center was utilized each day. At each center, a myriad of materials were available for children to choose and use in various ways. A different look at the collected data could possibly reveal which centers provided the most supportive peer dialogue for literacy learning. On the other hand, that kind of analysis may be difficult to ascertain from my data as my observations usually occurred on the same days (e.g. Wednesday and Thursday) each week. The way the rotation schedule for the children and my observation schedule worked out resulted in the same children being at the same centers for the majority of the data collection. It would be difficult to determine if it was the combination of children at the center or the activities and materials at the center that
caused a difference in peer dialogue at the various centers. A more comprehensive study could look at each center with various peer groups and analyze data to examine which materials and activities provide optimum peer dialogue to support literacy learning.

Another question is if various developmental levels of peer groups at each center would make a difference in the dialogue that supports literacy learning. For example, would dialogue between two children at buddy reading be more supportive of literacy learning with (a) one high-level reader and one low-level reader; or (b) equal level readers? This current data could not be used to answer this question as the developmental level of each child was not considered as a factor in the research. This question developed for me as I was transcribing and analyzing the data and some pairs of children seemed to have longer and more complex interactions while participating at buddy reading than others. Without knowing the reading levels of each child, this question, although interesting, cannot be analyzed with the current data.

Finally, research that looked at the peer dialogue at literacy centers in a diverse first-grade classroom would help to build theory on how peer dialogue supports literacy learning. So much of our research on peer dialogue to support literacy learning has been conducted in socially economic middle-class classrooms with predominately Caucasian children (Rowe, 2008; Tolentino, 2004). Researchers need to design and conduct this type of research in diverse settings, thus allowing for better understanding on the role of literacy centers in learning literacy for all children.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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**Children’s Literature**


APENDIX A

Child Interview Schedule
Child Interview Schedule

Name of Child________________________________ Date of Interview:____________

Name of Interviewer: _____________________________________________________

1. Which learning center is your favorite? Why?

2. When you go to learning centers, do you like working by yourself or with others?

3. Do you ever teach other children things at the learning centers? What?

4. Do you ever have other children teach you things at the learning center? What?

5. Why do you think the teacher has you work at learning centers?

6. If you could change something about the learning centers, what would it be?

7. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about learning centers?
APPENDIX B

First-grade Indicators
ACADEMIC CONTENT STANDARDS

Grade One

Phonemic Awareness, Word Recognition and Fluency

1. Identify and distinguish between letters, words and sentences.
2. Identify and say the beginning and ending sounds in words.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of letter-sound correspondence by saying the sounds from all letters and from a variety of letter patterns, such as consonant blends and long- and short-vowel patterns, and by matching sounds to the corresponding letters.
4. Decode by using letter-sound matches.
5. Use knowledge of common word families (e.g., -ite or -ate) to sound out unfamiliar words.
6. Blend two to four phonemes (sounds) into words.
7. Add, delete or change sounds in a given word to create new or rhyming words.
8. Demonstrate a growing stock of sight words.
9. Read text using fluid and automatic decoding skills, including knowledge of patterns, onsets and rimes.
10. Read aloud with changes in emphasis, voice, timing and expression that show a recognition of punctuation and an understanding of meaning.

Acquisition of Vocabulary

Contextual Understanding
1. Use knowledge of word order and in-sentence context clues to support word identification and to define unknown words while reading.

Conceptual Understanding
2. Identify words that have similar meanings (synonyms) and words that have opposite meanings (antonyms).
3. Classify words into categories (e.g., colors, fruits, vegetables).
4. Recognize common sight words.
5. Recognize that words can sound alike but have different meanings (e.g., homophones such as hair and hare).

Structural Understanding
6. Predict the meaning of compound words using knowledge of individual words (e.g., daydream, raindrop).

Grade One
7. Recognize contractions (e.g., isn’t, aren’t, can’t, won’t) and common abbreviations (e.g., Jan., Feb.).

8. Read root words and their inflectional endings (e.g., walk, walked, walking).

Tools and Resources

9. Determine the meaning of unknown words using a beginner’s dictionary.

Reading Process: Concepts of Print, Comprehension Strategies and Self-Monitoring Strategies

Concepts of Print

1. Describe the role of authors and illustrators.

2. Establish a purpose for reading (e.g., to be informed, to follow directions or to be entertained).

3. Visualize the information in texts and demonstrate this by drawing pictures, discussing images in texts or writing simple descriptions.

Comprehension Strategies

4. Make predictions while reading and support predictions with information from the text or prior experience.

5. Compare information (e.g., recognize similarities) in texts with prior knowledge and experience.

6. Recall the important ideas in fictional and non-fictional texts.

7. Create and use graphic organizers such as Venn diagrams or webs, with teacher assistance, to demonstrate comprehension.

8. Answer literal, simple inferential and evaluative questions to demonstrate comprehension of grade-appropriate print texts and electronic and visual media.

Self-Monitoring Strategies

9. Monitor comprehension of independently- or group-read texts by asking and answering questions.

Independent Reading

10. Use criteria to choose independent reading materials (e.g., personal interest, knowledge of authors and genres or recommendations from others).

11. Independently read books for various purposes (e.g., for enjoyment, for literary experience, to gain information or to perform a task).

Grade One
Reading Applications: Informational, Technical and Persuasive Text

1. Use title page, photographs, captions and illustrations (text features) to develop comprehension of informational texts.
2. Identify the sequence of events in informational text.
3. Ask questions concerning essential elements of informational text (e.g., why, who, where, what, when and how).
4. Identify central ideas and supporting details of informational text with teacher assistance.
5. Identify and discuss simple diagrams, charts, graphs and maps as characteristics of nonfiction.

Reading Applications: Literary Text

1. Provide own interpretation of story, using information from the text.
2. Identify characters, setting and events in a story.
3. Retell the beginning, middle and ending of a story, including its important events.
4. Identify differences between stories, poems and plays.
5. Recognize predictable patterns in stories and poems.

Writing Processes

**Prewriting**

1. Generate writing ideas through discussions with others.
2. Develop a main idea for writing.
3. Determine purpose and audience.
4. Use organizational strategies (e.g., brainstorming, lists, webs and Venn diagrams) to plan writing.

**Drafting, Revising and Editing**

5. Organize writing to include a beginning, middle and end.
6. Construct complete sentences with subjects and verbs.
7. Mimic language from literature when appropriate.

Grade One
ACADEMIC CONTENT STANDARDS

8. Use available technology to compose text.
10. Add descriptive words and details.
11. Use resources (e.g., a word wall, beginner’s dictionary, word bank) to select effective vocabulary.
12. Proofread writing to improve conventions (e.g., grammar, spelling, punctuation and capitalization).
13. Apply tools (e.g., rubric, checklist, feedback) to judge the quality of writing.
14. Rewrite and illustrate writing samples for display and for sharing with others.

Publishing

Writing Applications

1. Write simple stories with a beginning, middle and end that include descriptive words and details.
2. Write responses to stories that include simple judgments about the text.
3. Write friendly letters or invitations that follow a simple letter format.
4. Produce informal writings (e.g., messages, journals, notes and poems) for various purposes.

Writing Conventions

Handwriting
1. Print legibly and space letters, words and sentences appropriately.

Spelling
2. Spell words correctly with regular short vowel patterns and most common long vowel words (e.g., time, name).
3. Spell high-frequency words correctly.
4. Create phonetically-spelled written work that can usually be read by the writer and others.

Grade One

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ACADEMIC CONTENT STANDARDS

5. Spell unfamiliar words using strategies such as segmenting, sounding out and matching familiar words and word parts.

Punctuation and Capitalization
6. Use end punctuation correctly, including question marks, exclamation points and periods.
7. Use correct capitalization (e.g., the first word in a sentence, names and the pronoun I).

Grammar and Usage
8. Use nouns, verbs and adjectives (descriptive words).

Research
1. Discuss ideas for investigation about a topic or area of personal interest.
2. Utilize appropriate searching techniques to gather information, with teacher assistance, from a variety of locations (e.g., classroom, school library, public library or community resources).
3. Use books or observations to gather information to explain a topic or unit of study with teacher assistance.
4. Recall important information about a topic with teacher assistance.
5. Report information to others.

Communication: Oral and Visual

Listening and Viewing
1. Use active listening skills, such as making eye contact or asking questions.
2. Compare what is heard with prior knowledge and experience.
3. Follow simple oral directions.

Speaking Skills and Strategies
4. Speak clearly and understandably.

Speaking Applications
5. Deliver brief informational presentations that:
   a. demonstrate an understanding of the topic;
   b. include and sort relevant information and details to develop topic;
   c. organize information with a clear beginning and ending; and
d. express opinions.

Grade One
6. Deliver brief informal descriptive presentations recalling an event or personal experience that convey relevant information and descriptive details.

7. Deliver simple dramatic presentations (e.g., recite poems, rhymes, songs and stories).

Grade One
APPENDIX C

Consent Form from Mrs. Katola
I consent to my participation in research being conducted by Caroline Maurer, a student at The Ohio State University.

Ms. Maurer has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures that will be followed, and the amount of time it will take. I understand the possible benefits, or lack of, for my participation.

I know that I can choose not to participate without penalty to me. If I agree to participate, I know I can withdraw from the study at any time and there will not be a penalty.

I consent to the use of audiotapes and videotapes at the literacy centers and during interviews. I also consent to individual student interviews, focus groups of 5-6 children, photography of artifacts created by children, and interviews with me.

I have had a chance to ask questions and to obtain answers to my questions. If I have other questions I can contact Rebecca Kantor-Martin, the Principle Investigator at 614-292-8512 or Ms. Maurer at home (740-392-2694) or work (740-392-6868 ext. 3730) or via email at cmaurer@mvnu.edu. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I can call Sandra Meadow at the Office of Research Risks Protection at (614) 688-4792.

I have read this form or I have had it read to me. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been give to me.

Name of Participant: ____________________________

Date: ___________ Signed: _______________________

Caroline Maurer

(Researcher)

(Witness)
APPENDIX D

Request to Conduct Research
August 11, 2005

Dr. [Redacted],

My name is Caroline Maurer and I am a doctoral candidate at Ohio State University. Many gracious teachers in [Redacted] have allowed me to observe in their classrooms and have provided guidance as I have looked for a location to conduct my dissertation study. After several visits to excellent classrooms and talking with like-minded educators in the field, I would like to carry out my research in Ms. [Redacted] first grade classroom at [Redacted] Elementary School.

I have enclosed a one-page overview of the study, which summarizes the research and outlines the purpose, rational, and methods that I plan to use to collect data.

I have discussed the research design with Ms. [Redacted], [Redacted], and [Redacted] and am excited about the response I received from them concerning the topic and the desire to be a part of this investigation.

Preparing to complete a research study involves many details, including consent from all involved parties. I have completed a proposal for the Human Subjects Review Board at OSU and for my doctoral committee. The next step is official permission from [Redacted] City Schools to conduct the research in your district. After permission from your office, I will need to send a letter of consent to parents of the children involved in the study.

[Redacted] is aware of this and does not foresee a problem with parents giving permission. I also plan to spend a few minutes at the fall open house to explain and answer questions from parents concerning their child’s involvement in the study. Finally, I will explain my presence in the classroom to the children and ask them to agree to participate in the study. At anytime, a child or a family may choose to withdraw from the study.

I would like to start the research in mid-September of the school year and proceed for 14 weeks, possibly taking a break between Thanksgiving and the New Year. Hopefully, I will be able to complete data collection by the end of the second grading period.

If you have any questions about the proposed research design or methods, please do not hesitate to call. I would love to set up a meeting to discuss the study with you in more detail. If not, please complete the enclosed consent form and return to me by August 5th. This will allow me to continue to make the necessary arrangements to proceed with the study.

Thank you for your quick consideration.

Sincerely,

Caroline Maurer

c.c. [Redacted]

enclosures (3)
APPENDIX E

School District Support
To the Human Subjects Review Board of The Ohio State University,

As the superintendent's designee of the [School District], I confirm that Caroline Maurer has met with me and explained in detail the purpose of her proposed research project at [Elementary School]. I understand that she will be conducting the research in the classroom of [Teacher's Name], an employee of the [School District].

I also understand that Mrs. Maurer will secure written permission from the parents of the minors enrolled in [Classroom's] first grade classroom for the 2005-2006 school year.

Mrs. Maurer has our full support for her research project in the [School District].

Sincerely,

[Director of Teaching & Learning]

Mission of the [School District] is to provide, in cooperation with the larger community, a quality education for all students upholding a standard of excellence in curriculum, staff, facilities, achievement and conduct, and to graduate individuals empowered to be self-directed, lifelong learners and responsible citizens.

November 19, 1992.
APPENDIX F

Invitation to Attend Informational Meeting
YOU ARE INVITED TO A CLASSROOM MEETING

WHEN: September 21, 2005
TIME: 6:30 – 7:15
WHERE: Mrs. Kouba’s First Grade Classroom

WHY?

WHY: This year your child’s classroom has been selected to participate in a research study with Caroline Maurer, a doctoral student at the Ohio State University. This study is interested in the talk that children participate in while they are working at literacy learning centers in the classroom and how that talk supports reading and writing development.

Ms. Maurer is also a professor at Mount Vernon Nazarene University and has 15 years experience working with young children.

Data collection for the study will consist of observing children at literacy centers, making audiotape and videotape recordings of children’s dialogue, interviewing children individually and in groups, and collecting things that are made at the literacy centers.

This study is looking at only normal first grade classroom practice, so there is minimal risk for the children. The child’s privacy is very important so each child will receive a fictitious name when there is any discussion of the findings.

Participation is voluntary and there are no incentives or penalties for participation.

Come

Learn about the study
and
Ask questions

FREE CHILDCARE   FREE CHILDCARE   FREE CHILDCARE
APPENDIX G

PowerPoint Presentation of Research
THE NATURE OF PEER DIALOGUE DURING LITERACY CENTERS IN A FIRST GRADE CLASSROOM

Caroline Maurer

85% of first grade teachers who were nominated as effective by their supervisors in promoting literacy reported using learning centers (Pressley, Yokoi, & Rankin, 2000).

BUT

- We do not know what happens when the children are there.
- Usually, teachers are involved in a small group guided reading lesson while the children work independently and/or collaboratively at the literacy center.

Who is Mrs. Maurer

- Experience in teaching
- Director of Esther Jetter Preschool
- Assistant Professor
  - Emergent Literacy
  - Phonics
  - Art, Music, and Movement
  - Child Care Center Administration

What do we know about literacy centers?

1. We know good teachers use them.
2. We know how to set them up.
3. We know how to manage them.

Other Studies

Sharkey 1992
Research on literacy centers different because of teacher interaction

Morrow 1980 - Present
Research focused on how to create, manage, and use literacy centers.
Research Questions

1. What types of peer interactions do children engage in as they interact with peers and learning centers?
2. How does the peer dialogue that takes place during literacy centers support literacy learning?
3. How does the peer dialogue at an art center support literacy development?

Reasons for Study

- Teachers will know the best kind of centers to set up for young children.
- Teacher educators will be able to teach new teachers the best way to be a teacher.
- Classrooms will be more beneficial to children as teachers use more purposeful literacy centers.

Methodology

- 14 – 17 week long study
- Two visit to the site each week
  - Wednesday and Thursday – center time
- Usually one center per day observed and audio taped
  - Word Zone, Listening, Writing, Book Nook
- Video recording in art center – each visit

Data Collection Methods

- Observational Field Notes
  - Sit beside the group of children at the literacy center, listen, observe, and write their comments
  - The researcher does not interact with the children
- Artifacts
  - Written journals, documents, paintings, and other constructed materials that support the meaning of dialogue between peers
  - Artifacts will be photographed for analysis
- Audio Tape
  - This study relies on an accurate recording of what the children say
  - An audio recorder will be with the researcher
  - At the end of the session, the tape will be transcribed
**Data Collection Methods**

- Interviews with children
  - This gives children an opportunity to explain, describe, or share their ideas about literacy centers.
  - A short interview of each child

- Video Recordings
  - To focus on the interactions between children, art, and literacy, a video recording will be made of the art center each day of the observation.
  - These will be viewed, transcribed, and analyzed.

**Data Collection Methods**

- Focus Groups
  - Each participant will be a part of a small focus group.
    - Each group will watch a part of a video clip and discuss the interactions at the art center.
    - Allow the shared experience of literacy centers to be discussed together.
    - Aids in the recall of events.

**Data Analysis**

- Respect of the child is most important.
- All children will have fictional names.
- All data (tapes, videos, and written words) will be stored in a locked box at the researcher's home.
- The researcher is the only person with access to raw data.

**Participants**

- Each family and child will be asked to participate.
- Participation is voluntary with no incentives or penalties.
- Observations will be made when participants are at a center.

**Presentation of Findings**

- Parent Meeting in April/May
- Questions?
APPENDIX H

Parent Consent Letter and Form
September 21, 2005

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am currently a student at The Ohio State University and am working on my dissertation or final project before graduation. In addition, I teach in the education department at Mount Vernon Nazarene University - specifically in the area of literacy. In this study, I am interested in the dialogue that takes place between first grade children as they work together at learning centers and how peer talk supports reading and writing development.

I would like permission to observe your child this school year as he/she participates in classroom activities at Twin Oak Elementary during the literacy time block. Observations will be made twice a week for 14-16 weeks. My observations of your child will require no changes in his or her natural classroom environment, as I will only be observing typical first grade classroom practice.

This study is important, as it will provide teachers with a great deal of information regarding learning centers. First, it will help us to understand what children are gaining from the various types of centers. Second, it will help educators to appreciate the role of peer support in developing literacy behaviors. Finally, it will influence teacher-educators in training new teachers.

In order to document the language used, I will use both audio and video recordings of the classroom. Other methods of data collection include observations, digital photos of children’s work, as well as both individual and group interviews with students. In order to preserve the privacy of your child’s identity, all children will receive a pseudonym, or fictitious name when I write up the final paper.

You and your child are free to withdraw from participation in this inquiry at any time for any reason. If at any time you have questions about the data, I would be happy to share with you what I believe I am learning about young children’s literacy development.

If you have any other questions concerning the procedures of the study, please feel free to contact me at my home- 392-2694, or my office- 392-6868 ext. 3730, and I will be glad to answer any questions you have regarding the research.

Sincerely,

Caroline Maurer
Parent Consent Form

I consent to my child’s participation in research being conducted by Caroline Maurer, a student of The Ohio State University.

Ms. Maurer has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures that will be followed, and the amount of time it will take. I understand the possible benefits, if any, of my child’s participation.

I know that I can and my child can choose not to participate without penalty to me or to my child. If I agree for my child to participate, my child or I can withdraw from the study at any time, and there will be no penalty.

I consent to the use of audiotapes and videotapes. I understand how the tapes will be used for this study.

I consent to the use of the following information from my child’s cumulative school records: ethnicity, age, reading and achievement test scores, and evidence of social class.

I have had a chance to ask questions and to obtain answers to my questions. I can contact Caroline Maurer at 740-392-6868 ext. 3730. If I have questions about my child’s rights as a research participant, I can call the Office of Risks Protection at 614-688-4792.

I understand in signing this form that, beyond giving consent, I am not waiving any legal rights that I might otherwise have. My signature on this form does not release the investigator, the sponsor, the institution, or its agents from any legal liability for damages that they might otherwise have.

I have read this form, or I have had it read to me. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Print the name of the participant:

_____________________________ Date:________________________

Signed: _______________________
(Parent or Legal Guardian of Child)

Signed: _______________________
(Principal Investigator)

Office of Academic Services
614-292-2332

Integrated Teaching and Learning
614-292-6155

Language, Literacy, and Culture
614-292-0711 or 614-292-6593

Mathematics, Science, and Technology Education
614-292-8765
APPENDIX I

Script Outline for Classroom Meeting
Script Outline for Classroom Meeting

Does anyone know what a researcher is? (Take children’s ideas)

Discuss the role of a researcher.
   Asks questions
   Observes
   Listens
   Takes notes
   Writes down ideas

Discuss the study.
   My question – What do children talk about when they work together at literacy centers?
   My observations – I will sit at a literacy center to watch and listen. There will be a tape recorder with me so that I will be able to write down everything that is said.
   I will listen, take notes, and use a video and a tape recorder.
   I will have interviews, and focus groups. Explain what they are

Answer any questions the children have

Ask the children to agree to be a part of the study. Explain to them that they do not have to participate and that they can change their mind later.

Read the consent form to them and allow them to check off the items they agree to participate in.
APPENDIX J

Child Consent Form
Child Consent Form

My name is _____________________________________________.

Today I talked with Mrs. Maurer about researchers. She is learning to be a researcher and wants to practice in my class.

I understand that she will

______ watch and listen at the learning centers
______ tape record things that I say
______ video tape my work at the art center
______ ask me questions in an interview
______ show me and my friends parts of the videotape and let us talk about it
______ take pictures of my work

I agree to participate in this study today, but I can stop anytime I want to.

__________________________________________________________________________
Name                                      Date


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APPENDIX K

Assistant Confidentiality Disclosure
Assistant Confidentiality Disclosure

The right to privacy is very important to the children and families involved in this study. It is important for each and every person who works with the children and/or families to ensure that the information he or she learns about the children or families remain confidential. Read the following guidelines and sign to show agreement with the policy.

1. Any discussion about a child or family should only be with the researcher for an educational purpose.

2. When talking to a parent in the study, do not discuss an individual child’s behaviors or actions.

3. Any questions about a child, whether during the school hours or outside of the classroom, should be referred to the classroom teacher.

I have read and understand these policies. By signing this paper, I am agreeing that I will comply with each policy. Failure to do so could result in termination as an assistant.

Signature ___________________________ Date ___________________________
APPENDIX L

Rotation Chart
## Rotation Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Center</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening Center</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Study Words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Center Paint</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Center</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Books Read Room</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Center Poetry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX M

Indicators Met Through Peer Interactions
Ohio Academic Content Standards and Indicators for English Language Arts
Grade One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standards and Indicators</th>
<th>Examples from Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard One:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phonemic Awareness, Word Recognition, and Fluency</strong></td>
<td>1 2-4 5 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Identify and distinguish between letters, words, and sentences.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Identify and say the beginning and ending sounds in words.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Demonstrate an understanding of letter-sound correspondence by saying the sounds from all letters and from a variety of letter patterns, such as consonant blends and long and short vowel patterns, and by matching sounds to the corresponding letters.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Decode by using letter-sound matches.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Use knowledge of common word families to sound out unfamiliar words.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Blend two to four phonemes into words.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Add, delete, or change sounds in a given word to create new or rhyming words.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Demonstrate a growing stock of sight words.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Read text using fluid and automatic decoding skills, including knowledge of patterns, onsets, and rimes.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Read aloud with changes in emphasis, voice, timing, and expression that show recognition of punctuation and an understanding of meaning.</td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>

| **Standard Two:**        |                    |
| **Acquisition of Vocabulary** |                |
| 1. Use knowledge of word order and in-sentence context clues to support word identification and to define unknown words while reading. |                |
| 2. Identify words that have similar meanings (synonyms) and words that have opposite meaning (antonyms). | X |
| 3. Classify words into categories (e.g., colors, fruits, vegetables). | X |
| 4. Recognize common sight words. | X |
| 5. Recognize that words can sound alike but have different meanings (e.g., homophones such as hair and hare). | X |
| 6. Predict the meaning of compound words using knowledge of individual words (e.g., daydream, raindrop). | X |
| 7. Recognize contractions (e.g., isn’t, aren’t, can’t, won’t) and common abbreviations (e.g., Jan., Feb.). |                |
8. Read root words and their inflectional endings (e.g., walk, walked, walking).  

9. Determine the meaning of unknown words using a beginner’s dictionary.

### Standard Three:

**Reading Process: Concepts of Print, Comprehension Strategies, and Self Monitoring Strategies**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Describe the role of authors and illustrators.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Establish a purpose for reading (e.g., to be informed, to follow directions, or to be entertained).</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Visualize the information in texts and demonstrate this by drawing pictures, discussing images in texts, or writing simple descriptions.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Make predictions while reading and support predictions with information from the text or prior experience.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Compare information (e.g., recognize similarities) in texts with prior knowledge and experience.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Recall the important ideas in fictional and non-fictional texts.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Create and use graphic organizers such as Venn Diagrams or webs, with teacher assistance, to demonstrate comprehension.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Answer literal, simple inferential and evaluative questions to demonstrate comprehension of grade-appropriate print texts and electronic and visual media.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Monitor comprehension of independently – or group-read texts by asking and answering questions.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Use criteria to choose independent reading materials (e.g., personal interest, knowledge of authors, and genres, or recommendations from others).</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Independently read books for various purposes (e.g., for enjoyment, for literary experience, to gain information or to perform a task).</td>
<td>X</td>
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### Standard Four:

**Reading Applications: Informational, Technical and Persuasive Text**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Use title page, photographs, captions, and illustrations (text features) to develop comprehension of informational texts.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Identify the sequence of events in informational text.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Ask questions concerning essential elements of informational text (e.g., why, who, where, what, when, and how).</td>
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</table>
4. Identify central ideas and supporting details of informational text with teacher assistance.

5. Identify and discuss simple diagrams, charts, graphs, and maps as characteristics of non-fiction. **X**


**Standard Five:**

**Reading Applications: Literary Text Standard**

1. Provide own interpretation of story, using information from the text. **X**

2. Identify characters, setting, and events in a story. **X**

3. Retell the beginning, middle, and ending of a story, including its important events. **X**

4. Identify differences between stories, poems, and plays. **X**

5. Recognize predictable patterns in stories and poems. **X**

**Standard Six:**

**Writing Process Standard**

1. Generate writing ideas through discussions with others.

2. Develop a main idea for writing.

3. Determine purpose and audience.

4. Use organizational strategies (e.g., brainstorming, list, webs, and Venn diagrams) to plan writing.

5. Organize writing to include a beginning, middle, and end.

6. Construct complete sentences with subjects and verbs.

7. Mimic language from literature with appropriate

8. Use available technology to compose text. **X**


10. Add descriptive words and details.

11. Use resources (e.g., a word wall, beginner’s dictionary, word bank) to select effective vocabulary.

12. Proofread writing to improve conventions (e.g., grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization). **X**

13. Apply tools (e.g., rubric, checklist, feedback – to judge the quality of writing.

14. Rewrite and illustrate writing samples for display and for sharing with others. **X**

**Standard Seven:**

**Writing Application Standard**

1. Write simple stories with a beginning, middle and end that include descriptive words and details.

2. Write responses to stories that include simple judgments about
the text.

3. Write friendly letters or invitations that follow a simple letter format.

4. Produce informal writings (e.g., messages, journals, notes and poems) for various purposes.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Standard Eight: Writing Applications</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Print legibly and space letters, words, and sentences appropriately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Spell words correctly with regular short vowel patterns and most common long vowel words (e.g., time, name.)</td>
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<td>3. Spell high-frequency words correctly.</td>
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<td>4. Create phonetically-spelled written work that can usually be read by the writer and others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Spell unfamiliar words using strategies such as segmenting, sounding out and matching familiar words and word parts.</td>
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<td>6. Use end punctuation correctly, including question marks, exclamation points and periods.</td>
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<td>7. Use correct capitalization (e.g., the first word in a sentence, names and the pronoun I).</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Use nouns, verbs and adjectives (descriptive words).</td>
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<th>Standard Nine: Research</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Discuss ideas for investigation about a topic or area of personal interest.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Utilize appropriate searching techniques to gather information, with teacher assistance, from a variety of locations (e.g., classroom, school library, public library or community resources).</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Use books or observations to gather information to explain a topic or unit of study with teacher assistance.</td>
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<td>4. Recall important information about a topic with teacher assistance.</td>
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<td>5. Report information to others.</td>
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<th>Standard Ten: Communication: Oral and Visual</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Use active listening skills, such as making eye contact or asking questions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Compare what is heard with prior knowledge and experience.</td>
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<td>3. Follow simple oral directions.</td>
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<td>4. Speak clearly and understandably.</td>
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<td>5. Deliver brief informational presentations that:</td>
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a) Demonstrate an understanding of a topic;
b) Include and sort relevant information and details to develop topic;
c) Organize information with a clear beginning and ending; and
d) Express opinion.

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<td>6.</td>
<td>Deliver brief informal descriptive presentations recalling an event or personal experience that convey relevant information and descriptive details.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Deliver simple dramatic presentations (e.g. recite poems, rhymes, songs and stories).</td>
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MOE, the dog in Tropical Paradise

Moe and Arlene worked in an ice cream factory.

Pain Stanley

ELi

Ri Maken
They had a week's vacation.

Moe and Arlene went to the movies and the heater broke down.
They left the movies and went to get some hot chocolate.

A marshmallow stuck to Arlene's nose and Moe laughed.
All of the vacations cost too much.

They waved good-bye and on the way, Moe got splashed.
Moe went home and took a hot bath.

Moe got an idea.
He went to the grocery store, the hardware store, and the attic.

He made tropical paradise in his house.
The next morning, Moe called Arlene.

He said, "I'm in tropical paradise. I forgot to turn off the lights. Would you go over and turn them off and bring your swimsuit?"
Arlene went to Moe's house. Moe said, "Welcome to Tropical Paradise."
They had a great time.

They said, "Where shall we go next year?"
"How about Egypt?"
"Let's save the sand."