Examining the Values and Assumptions Embedded in
Second-grade Literacy Instruction

Dissertation

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the literacy practices in two second-grade classrooms. Ethnographic in nature, this study was focused on understanding the values, beliefs and expectations associated with literacy. Set in a New Literacy Studies framework, this research was set in the assumption that literacy is not a neutral concept, but is instead is bound up in cultural practices and defined according to the needs of cultures and communities. These values are not always easily articulated or recognized by participants. Although texts are associated with the values and expectations of participants, classroom participants, these values are not always shared by all participants. Classroom texts are often assigned by outside forces and represent the values of those in power over teachers and students. Because of this, this study included the concept of a hidden curriculum in the theoretical framework and an analysis of the values represented in the curricular texts.

Any time participants exist in unequal relationships of power, the question of whose values hold sway must come up. This research study considered not only what literacy practices were in classroom literacy instruction, but also who had the power to determine how texts were to be defined, used and valued. When studying the concept of power, it is vital to consider the issue of agency. In this study, the researcher questioned whether or not students and teachers felt a sense of agency either to advance their own interests of those of others.
Using primarily participant observation, but also interviews with participants and document analysis, this study demonstrated that although teachers were the primary determinants of classroom literacy practices, whether or not they felt a strong sense of personal agency determined whether or not they recognized the power they had to affect change in their classrooms.
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When I entered the doctoral program at Ohio State five years ago, I thought I was prepared for what was to come and I laugh at how naïve I was. It was a sometimes bumpy road, filled with frustrations, confusions, and sometimes irritations, but also a journey filled with learning, change and growth. This work would not have been possible without the help of many people who guided me and had faith in me in this process. This dissertation is the culmination of several years’ work and I could not have made it through without their support.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

*Literacy to me would mean knowing your alphabet, and being able to put letters together to make words and to read words, and just basically knowing that you read from left to right.*—Susan

*To me literacy involves anything that has to do with reading of any kind in any manner and in any place.*—Donna

The above quotations were from the teachers of the two second-grade classrooms in which I conducted my research for several months. My goal was to try to understand what literacy practices the children in these two classrooms were being taught, and much of it involved understanding how literacy was used and defined by the teachers and students. The statements from these teachers exemplify the debates and confusion that occur regarding literacy and literacy instruction. These teachers, both second-grade teachers at Clayton Elementary School, teaching the same curriculum, had vastly different perspectives of just what literacy is. For some like Susan, literacy is a set of clearly identifiable and separable skills that can be passed on to students. For others like Donna, literacy is holistic and inclusive of all texts everywhere. Although reading requires skills, everyone is literate to some degree.

With the acknowledgement that literacy does not have the same definition for everyone comes the acknowledgement that these varying definitions are attached to people’s assumptions regarding how reading and writing are used and by whom. In this
study I address how texts were used in these two second-grade classrooms and what values and beliefs were associated with reading and writing. Through the course of several months of observation, interviews and document collection, I sought to understand the values and beliefs embedded within the literacy instructional time.

Statement of the problem

Since as early as the turn of the last century, educators have been developing curricula and designing schools that would produce the kind of citizen deemed necessary by the current society (Bruner, 1966). Although sometimes cultural expectations are made clear, often they are buried deep within the classroom instruction, so subtly hidden that instructors themselves may not be aware that instead of just teaching the ABCs, they are also socializing children to a particular society’s expectations (Anyon, 1980; Apple, 2004). A curriculum is more than the overt objectives of a lesson; curricular decisions are value-laden and highly political (Apple, 1990; Pinar, 1981).

Schools are not enclosed entities, separate from the cultural influences of the societies in which they exist. Quite the contrary, schools are built by and structured according to societal needs and expectations (Apple, 2004). Historically, as society has changed, schools have also, following almost pendular shifts with deep ideological movements. In addition to teaching factual information, curricula contain assumptions of what is normal in society (Apple, 2004).

In part of this research study, I addressed the question of what values were represented in the classroom literacy curriculum. These texts were created, chosen, and mandated for classroom use by people largely disconnected from the classrooms. These curricular texts had a prominent place in classroom literacy events, but were
representative of the expectations and literacy practices of members of the larger culture outside the classrooms and schools. Texts themselves are not active participants in literacy events; rather it is how participants use the texts that bring meaning to them, so I also considered how teachers made decisions on what texts to include, exclude and alter. Curriculum texts are heavy with meaning and in order to understand classroom literacy practices, researchers need to know how these curricular expectations influence these practices.

Although there has been research regarding curricular ideologies (e.g. Anyon, 1980; Franklin & Johnson, 2008; Kohl, 1991), little attention has been given to the ideologies relating specifically to literacy curricula and how they are enacted in the classroom. Much of the attention relating to literacy curricula has been focused on instructional effectiveness, not on questioning the ideologies that guide instruction. Because school curricula represent the ideologies of outside power groups, it is important to recognize this influence in classroom literacy practices.

Not only is it important to conduct research on how curricula influence classroom practices, it is also important to consider how definitions of literacy have affected research regarding classroom literacy practices. In 1967, Jeanne Chall published *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* in an attempt to “determine the best methods for teaching beginning reading” (p.1). The book was aptly titled, for rather than settle the question of literacy instruction and acquisition, it merely added to the heated debate that continues to rage on the subject of literacy in schools. For the decades following Chall’s book, much of the literacy research in schools was focused on instructional methods and how to enable children to best learn to read and write.
With a focus on understanding how to enable children to read and write, this research tended to present a one-size-fits-all definition of literacy (Street, 2003). In seeking to find the best way to teach reading and writing, researchers often treated literacy as a neutral and universal skill, something that could be passed on as long as the right method of instruction could be found.

Research on literacy instruction has frequently been focused on the concept of finding the “best” or most effective methods of enabling children to learn to read and write. In 2000, the National Reading Panel submitted a report to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development containing their recommendations for improving reading and writing instruction. Based on a review of mostly quantitative, experimental studies, this report’s recommendations were that children be taught phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension skills in a direct, systematic manner (NICHD, 2000).

Commercial curriculum writers took the panel’s recommendations and ran with it and district administrators assigned the new curricula, all on the belief that these new and improved instructional materials would make teaching and learning easier and more efficient (Adams, 1997). In Middletown School District, teachers were rarely asked whether or not they wanted to use the new curriculum, just as they had not been asked when new curricula were adopted before. Each new curriculum was based on literacy research and was supposed to improve teaching and learning.

Some teachers, like Susan in this study, clung to the curriculum and followed it closely, making occasional changes, but depending heavily on it for classroom structure and materials. Others, like Donna, used what she liked, ignored what she did not, and
added where she felt it was lacking, being grateful that “it’s better than the one we had before.” For Donna, the curriculum is a tool, and it is the teachers who are helping children to learn to read and write. From this perspective, the teachers have the greatest influence in the classrooms. Although instructional texts were quite influential and had strong messages in the two classrooms I observed, I found it was the teachers, not the curriculum, that had the most say in determining what the class looked like and how it would be structured.

When literacy research is solely focused on instruction and understanding what is most effective in enabling children to learn to read and write, it leaves out the human part of the equation. The purpose instead is to determine what is being done and how effectively, according to a chosen set of standards, in order to transplant those actions to other schools and classrooms. This concept is far too simplistic, as it ignores ideologies and presumes that literacy and classroom participants are the same everywhere.

Just a few years after Chall’s influential book, Shirley Brice Heath began her research into the linguistic practices of small communities in the Piedmont region of the Carolinas, which would strongly influence the concept of literacy as a social practice, tied to people’s cultural ideologies (Heath, 2006). This study signaled another shift in focus, as researchers around this time were beginning to see language and literacy as closely connected to cultural values.

The word culture is used frequently in research, but the definition of culture can be quite elusive and variable. In this study, I use Street’s definition of culture as a sense of a shared set of taken-for-granted values, beliefs and assumptions (Street, 1995). The children and teachers who arrive at school bring with them the values and assumptions
they learn at home and in their communities. Cultures are very difficult to identify, and the distinctions between cultures are often nebulous, especially in such a diverse country as the United States, which does not have a single culture. Cultures are made up of groups of people and communities that frequently have similar experiences and ways of living, but they can be hard to identify because people do not always live in isolated communities. Because of this, despite being part of a larger culture, individuals and families within communities may have practices that can be attributed to different cultures.

The students at Clayton Elementary had mostly all grown up in the same community, but their neighborhood was part of a large city. In addition, children’s families came from many different communities, some of which have been identified as distinct cultures. For example, some children’s families originated in Appalachia, so those children were influenced by both their families’ practices and those they encountered in their neighborhood community and school.

Like other communities that have their own practices and influences, classrooms are part of a larger culture but also have their own local practices created by the participants. Classroom communities are created by teachers and students and they bring with them their own influences and values. In this study, I use the word culture primarily in reference to a broad set of taken-for-granted values which could be claimed by a large section of society. Sometimes I refer specifically to different cultures, in the sense that there are societies that by nature of nationality, language, religion or history share an identity and sometimes consider themselves to be separate from most members of the larger society. Often, I use the word cultural, which is not intended to refer to a specific
culture, but the abstract concept that values, beliefs and practices originate and are negotiated through the lenses of societies that share identities and assumptions. I use the word *community* to indicate small, local sections of a larger society, such as neighborhoods, the school or classrooms. These communities often have distinct practices but tend to have many shared identities and practices with a larger culture.

Within these shared, taken-for-granted assumptions must be the question of *whose* assumptions hold sway. Particularly in schools, where participants are not necessarily from the same community, some outside cultural values clash with others, and in the negotiation of meaning that takes place in the classroom, some values become dominant over others. Heath (2006) observed this when children from Trackton and Roadville entered the Maintown schools and struggled to hold onto their own cultural practices while trying to negotiate the dominant practices. Researching classrooms as cultural constructs necessitates questioning whose values hold sway and whose are being suppressed.

As the research on literacy as a cultural construct has progressed, much of the focus has been on how reading and writing were used and valued in communities, sometimes in contrast to schools (e.g. Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Heath 2006; Street 1995). This interest in how communities used and valued literacy signaled a shift from a focus on literacy instruction in schools and a focus on how reading and writing are valued and defined within cultures, rather than in the one-size-fits-all world of literacy instruction.

Street described this dichotomy as autonomous versus ideological literacies. From the autonomous model of literacy, reading and writing were the same everywhere, a
single, monolithic concept (Street 1995). Research from this perspective treated reading and writing in technical terms, as a purely cognitive skill, independent of context (Collins & Blot, 2003; Purcell-Gates, Jacobson & Degener, 2004). In treating literacy this way, researchers were not taking into account cultural differences. When children entered school, they brought with them the beliefs, values and practices of their home culture and these home cultures could influence and sometimes clash with the cultural values of the school (Heath, 2006; Heath & Street, 2008).

New Literacy Studies research has been focused on the use of reading and writing within communities, such as Barton and Hamilton’s study of an English community (1998) and Street’s study of rural Iranian communities (Street, 1995). Most New Literacy Studies research has presented school-based literacy practices as institutions representing the larger culture, and in many ways classrooms do that. They are strongly influenced by participants’ home cultures, which they bring to the classroom. Bruna (2007) saw how classroom literacy practices were defined by the teacher’s personal literacy practices, and students were expected to conform to her expectations.

Although they are influenced by outside cultural values, classrooms and schools are still local communities with their own literacy practices. While teachers and students bring in outside values, as they inevitably do, they negotiate meanings in unique spaces. It is important to examine the practices as they were created and used inside the classrooms. This research addressed the concept of literacy practices in reading and writing curriculum and instruction, questioning how they were created and by whom within the classrooms.
Description of the research

*Research assumptions*

This research study was based on several theoretical assumptions, the first of which is that literacy is not the same everywhere. Set within a New Literacy Studies framework, my assumptions present literacy as practices that vary depending on the context and culture of those involved in the situation. Within this framework, I used four distinct lenses: that literacy is a local construct; literacy is connected to global values and power structures; literacy is defined within social situations and literacy is made up of multiple values and expectations associated with texts. I have also added a fifth lens, that literacy is agentive and associated with either advancing or hindering participants’ sense of personal agency.

Literacy is connected to cultural values and beliefs about reading and writing (Heath & Street, 2008). In schools, these practices sometimes collide and either become dominant or marginalized. For the newly immigrated Mexican students in the classrooms Bruna (2007) observed, subtle text creation served many purposes which were misunderstood by their teachers. While teachers saw writing, or “tagging” on chairs and desks as graffiti and vandalism, for the students it was a significant way of expressing their individual presence in the school. Similarly, writing on the whiteboard during a confusing science assignment was, in their cultural practices, a subtle and respectful way of indicating a need for assistance, but through the teacher’s eyes, it was a time-waster (Bruna, 2007). These various purposes for and kinds of text were closely connected to cultural values.
Acknowledging that reading and writing are connected to and defined by ideological beliefs is a first step to understanding what literacy looks like within a culture (Gee, 1999; Street, 1995). As such, literacy is an inherently local construct, bound up in the beliefs and values of the communities using the texts. The people of Roadville, in Heath’s study (2006) had strict gender roles for certain activities, and these roles carried over into literacy practices. Letter writing and the use of written recipes were practices only associated with and valued by women.

I also entered these classrooms with the assumption that literacy practices are by nature socially created and meaning is socially negotiated. All participants in a situation have a say in how meaning is being created and how texts are to be understood. For this reason, it was important for me to try to understand not only the teachers’ perspectives, but also the students’. Students were not passive receptors of knowledge; they had a hand in literacy events and a role in text and literacy practice creation.

That is not to say all participants have equal roles or equal say in determining what literacy practices are valuable. It is quite the opposite, in fact. Another assumption was that teachers would hold greater dominance over literacy practices than the students. This assumption was based on the understanding that the teacher is generally considered to be “in charge” both of students’ behavior and learning and has the responsibility of structuring the classroom as she sees fit (Smith, 2008). Because of the unequal nature of student and teacher roles, their roles in the creation of literacy practices were also likely to be unequal.

Because part of my research involved analyzing curriculum texts, I began with the belief that texts by themselves were not neutral artifacts. Although participants used texts
according to their needs, texts by themselves were still representative of their creators. In examining the curriculum without the classroom context, I took a more global focus and approached it from the intent of understanding it from the perspective of its creators and those who assigned it to the teachers.

Every text has meaning and purpose, and sometimes these meanings are different for different groups. This multiple nature of texts means there can be significant variation between participants and communities regarding how they use and value texts. Smith (2008) noted numerous kinds of text in the honors classroom that participated in her study. Each kind of text had a distinct format and purpose and was closely connected to how the teachers and students valued them. Sometimes these values contradicted each other and one group’s values held sway over the other’s.

Although the previous four facets of literacy—local, global, social and multiple—have been recognized as common dimensions of literacy, I have added a fifth, literacy as agentive. Agency is the concept that people have the sense that their own actions affect the world around them and they have the ability to affect change (Johnston, 2004). In this sense, it is not the texts themselves that encourage people to become agents of themselves or for others, but the practices of the culture or community. Classroom literacy practices may be suppressive of agency or encourage teacher and student agency.

I also approached this research with the belief that sometimes a “hidden” curriculum (Apple, 2004) could be found in texts, subtle messages relating to cultural values and norms. In making this assumption, I had to make sure I did not try to see things that weren’t really there, but instead to only look for what was there, just under the surface of overt meaning.
In the last several years, literacy researchers have disagreed over just what count as texts. For the purposes of this research, I relied on the assumption that texts were alphabetic in nature, which could be either physical or digital, temporary (written on a white/chalkboard) or permanent. Although they were often closely connected to images in the two classrooms I observed, texts and images were not always used in the same ways, with texts often being the primary source of information, and images being seen as supplementary. It was for that reason I made a clear distinction between texts and images.

My role in this research was to present these classrooms as I understood them, with as much of the participants’ perspectives as possible, but because cultural values are sometimes so deeply embedded they are difficult for participants to identify, it is important to recognize the role I played in representing what I saw. I tried to represent my observations accurately and honestly, but I also must acknowledge the assumptions I had going into the classrooms. I also had a role in the classrooms and my presence affected classroom practices, on occasion. As much as I tried to minimize this effect, my assumption was that when I became a guest in these classrooms, I affected how students and teachers behaved, however slightly.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to understand how reading and writing instruction is used to socialize children to dominant cultural values, especially as these values relate to literacy. With this purpose it was important to understand what cultural values exist during the instructional time and how participants understand and negotiate the values through interactions with one another and texts.
The idea of literacy being connected to cultural values and situated practices means when using an ethnographic focus, I was not looking at reading and writing, per se, but rather at how reading and writing are used in literacy practices and what messages and values are embedded in these practices.

With this purpose in mind, I crafted the following questions for this study:

1. What are the literacy practices in second grade classroom instructional time?
2. What beliefs, attitudes and values guide literacy instruction in classrooms and whose are they?
3. What beliefs, attitudes and values are embedded within curriculum materials?
4. What conflicting understandings of literacy exist among the teachers, students and curriculum materials?
5. How do students and teachers perceive their own sense of personal agency and work to help or hinder others’ agency as a part of classroom literacy practices?

The final question was not one of my initial questions, but arose out of the data collection and became a significant source of interest. The first question was the overall goal, which was answered through the rest of the questions. To understand the literacy practices in these two classrooms, I first had to understand the beliefs, values and assumptions of participants and those influencing the classrooms. Both teachers and students had separate values and beliefs regarding literacy, so I examined where these values conflicted and, because there were such unequal power relationships, which values held dominance. Curriculum materials are listed as sources of values and beliefs, but this is not to say that the texts themselves were the influences rather, they were the
representation of those power groups outside the classrooms that held a great deal of influence.

Based on these research questions, I created four guiding questions that would aid my data collection. My goal was to look for patterns and principles of practice so the questions centered on how members of these two classroom cultures used reading and writing to participate in a social group and what values were attached to text and behaviors (Green, et al., 2003). These questions were designed to be tools to direct and focus my data collection and analysis.

1. What literacy events are described in the curricular materials?
2. What literacy events are common in each classroom?
3. How do literacy events prescribed in the curriculum differ from those that take place in the classroom?
4. How do teachers and students negotiate meaning in classroom literacy events?

This research was focused on literacy events as a whole, and not just on the children as participants. Instead, I focused on the curriculum, teachers and students collectively. These were the initial questions, but in order to be able to dig deep and maintain a logical organization, these questions were broken down into two and three-week increments within the four phases of data collection and progressively built onto one another (see Appendix A). These questions followed a logical narrowing of focus for my observations, first starting with understanding the literacy materials that describe expected literacy events, then connecting these materials with classroom events, and finally focusing on the participants within these events.
My analysis of this research involved identifying literacy events and coding them for key themes and patterns. This analysis revealed several interesting themes relating to literacy as local, global, social, multiple and agentive constructs. Because analysis was recursive, the information learned from each question was built into the next phase.

Significance of the study

This study adds to the conversation about the cultural nature of literacy by providing insight into school-based literacy practices. Schools are becoming increasingly diverse and teachers and administrators are sometimes at a loss to how to address cultural differences. Results of this study will better inform schools on how literacy instruction is linked to cultural beliefs. In this study, I treat classrooms as individual communities, part of a larger culture but with their own locally-created literacy practices. In treating classrooms this way, I examined how the participants’ differing values worked to create classroom literacy practices. In this study, both students and teachers were treated as contributors to practices, albeit unequal ones. Students were not treated as passive recipients to teachers’ actions; instead, I examined how they affected the classrooms.

It would be naïve to believe the participants had sole influence in the classrooms; in this study, I questioned how district-mandated curriculum materials influenced and affected classroom literacy practices in ways not addressed in other studies. This aspect of my research provided insight into where literacy practices originate and who has the power to control and define literacy practices.
Summary of the following chapters

In Chapter Two I discuss the theories and assumptions that informed my research. I approached this study from a New Literacy Studies perspective, assuming that literacy was defined by the needs and values of the classroom participants. I also employed hidden curriculum theory, in which covert learning outcomes are embedded within instruction and curriculum. In this chapter I discuss the concept of agency as it relates to student and teacher interactions in the classroom.

In Chapter Three, I describe my research methodology and the process I went through in selecting the school and participants. Researching from an ethnographic perspective, I made use of several data collection methods, including participant observation, interviews and document collection. In this chapter I discuss my methods for analysis, which involved identification and analysis of literacy events and coding of patterns.

In Chapter Four I present a description of the common literacy events that took place in both classrooms. Part of my study focus was to understand how the power structures mandating the curriculum influenced classroom literacy practices, so I begin by describing the events and patterns prescribed in the curriculum. Because my focus was on these two classrooms as local entities with their own practices, it was important to identify how they were similar to and distinct from each other in their common events. In many ways, this was where the teachers’ personal practices and teaching styles began to shine through. These patterns of practice served as the foundation for the identification of common themes.
In Chapter Five, I present my findings from my data collection. As I described earlier, I used the lenses that literacy practices were local, global, social, multiple and agentive. Each of these concepts provided insight into how participants defined and used literacy. In looking at the data through each of these distinct lenses, the issues of issues of meaning, conformity, responsibility, texts purposes and agency arose, and I address how they played out in the curriculum and classrooms.

In Chapter Six, I discuss the implications of these findings and how they can affect future classrooms and curriculum development. Curriculum developers need to consider how literacy is defined and how the lifestyles represented in chosen texts either normalizes or marginalizes students’ lives. A major portion of my findings was that teachers wielded a great deal of influence over classroom literacy practices, so I discuss how teachers and teacher educators need to ensure that teachers develop an awareness of their own literacy practices and develop a stronger sense of agency so they can address students’ needs in the classroom.
Chapter 2: Review of the Relevant Literature

I began my research with a New Literacy Studies framework, in which literacy is understood as an ideological construct, situated within and defined by social interactions. In the following sections, I describe the basis for research from New Literacy Studies framework, with an eye toward the hidden curriculum and student and teacher agency. While each concept is often researched independently, they coincide to create a complex understanding of the elementary school literacy classroom, which was the focus of this study.

Researching from a New Literacy Studies framework involves seeing all participants as meaning-makers in a community with specific literacy practices. Because of the localized nature of literacy practices, more global practices tend to be ignored. This study considers the global implications of classroom literacy practices through an examination of the curriculum and district expectations imposed upon the teachers and students. Although participants make meaning with texts in literacy events, texts do have meaning that has been imposed upon participants by outside forces, and this study examines what meaning is embedded in the literacy curriculum that students and teachers use.

With this research comes an assumption of a hidden curriculum in the district-mandated curriculum, in which outside assumptions and beliefs are imposed upon the classroom participants. Literacy practices are made up of cultural beliefs and classroom participants bring their own practices to the classroom. This research examines both the
literacy curriculum and teachers’ assumptions regarding the values and expectations present in the classroom and addresses how students react to these values.

While New Literacy Studies assumes all participants have varying levels of agency, the hidden curriculum does not always address this concept, treating some participants as oppressed and passive learners. This study creates a space to question just what kind of agency both teachers and students have in the classroom, what choices they have and how these choices play out in the lived experiences of the classroom atmosphere.

Literacy from the New Literacy Studies Framework

Historically, literacy has been treated as a cognition-based, value-neutral, technical skill that, once acquired, can be transmitted from situation to situation (Collins & Blot, 2003; Gee, 1999; Purcell-Gates, et al., 2004; Street, 1999). This perspective, that reading and writing are autonomous skills free of context, was the basis for literacy research and education until the last few decades, when researchers began questioning the social and cultural nature of literacy. Contrary to this “autonomous” model, where reading and writing are the same everywhere, a single, monolithic concept, is an ideological model of literacy (Blackburn & Clark, 2007; Street, 1984; Street, 1995). As such, literacy is embedded within and defined by one’s culture (Bruna, 2007; Godley, 2003; Street, 1984; 1995).

Acknowledging that reading and writing are connected to and defined by ideological beliefs is a first step to understanding what literacy is within a culture (Gee, 1999). Rather than use the traditional cognitive perspective, this research is framed around a New Literacy Studies perspective, in which literacy is connected to cultural
values and beliefs about reading and writing (Godley, 2003; Smith, 2008; Street, 1999). As an ideological construct, the definition of literacy and use of text vary by both context and culture.

Because it is defined within social settings, it is more useful to speak of literacy *practices*, rather than a single concept (Bruna, 2007). Literacy practices are conceptualized as the methods of using text within a sociocultural setting and the values that are associated with those methods (Heath & Street, 2008; Purcell-Gates, 2004). It is about how people use reading and writing within our contextually situated lives (Grote, 2006). Literacy practices are created within cultures and communities, not by individuals, and reading and writing are located within broad social practices (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Luke & Freebody, 1997; Street, 1999). People in different contexts attach different meanings and values to a variety of texts. Literacy as a cultural construct is a complex issue with many facets. To understand the nature of literacy as an ideological construct, it is important to examine the various aspects that make it up. In the following section, I will present four key issues of literacy from the New Literacy Studies perspective and how it plays out in schools: 1) literacy as social; 2) literacy as local; 3) literacy as multiple; 4) literacy as global. The fact that these issues have been separated into categories does not mean they are to be treated as isolated issues. They are divided in order to highlight the distinct concepts, but they also overlap and exist in the same space.

*Literacy as Social*

At its very basic, literacy is a social practice, and meaning is negotiated and created by participants (Purcell-Gates, et. al, 2004). In contrast to the cognitive perspective, in which reading and writing are treated as individual, independent actions,
reading and writing are inherently social events (Grote, 2006; Godley, 2003; Street, 2003). When a group of people is engaged in an event that involves written text, meaning is dependent upon participants’ cultural lenses and practices are mediated through social relationships. Hubbard’s observations of sixth-graders’ use of text are just as applicable today as when she first wrote about them more than twenty years ago (1989). During her research, she observed how students created an unofficial literacy space in the classroom in which the teachers were not included. Texts took on new meanings and values when students included them in their personal interactions. Bruna’s (2007) observations of newly-arrived Mexican students in a California high school revealed specific literacy practices that they used to identify themselves to others as Mexican.

In any social group, the people involved all have roles with rules about who is allowed to do what and how to use texts (Barton, 1991). School literacy practices in particular are socially constructed with set rules about who does what (Street & Street, 1991). Many people contribute to literacy events, but the school-based literacy practices are modeled and often imposed by adults (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Luke & Freebody, 1997; Street & Street, 1991). Children learn how they are expected to use reading and writing at an early age, and they negotiate these understandings within a social atmosphere (Gee, 1990). When teachers and students interact with texts, the texts themselves are part of a social practice. Even when students are reading “independently,” they are still in a socially-created event reading texts written (and sometimes chosen) by someone else. Many of these events and practices are dictated by the curriculum, which was written and mandated by still another group of people.
When participants in social events use written text, they use them for specific purposes and are influenced by others. Even in classrooms where the teacher’s word holds sway, students contribute to the meaning-making (Langer, 1995). This was made obvious to Smith when she observed high school students interacting with their teachers in a multi-subject honors class (2008). In one instance, the teachers assigned an activity in which the students were to suggest and vote on group names. This occurred after the teachers had spent some time explaining the high expectations placed on them as honors students and several of the students’ suggested names contradicted those high expectations, such as “Dumb” and “Dumber.” Although the teachers were using this assignment to demonstrate democracy and responsibility, the students added a new meaning by subverting the identities placed upon them.

In every context, participants engage in literacy practices not only with text but also with others. Literacy must always be inherently social, because people live in a social world and meaning is dependent upon the perceptions and understandings of everyone, not just the individual. Meaning is negotiated, explored and contested as members of a situation interact with one another and texts (Street, 2003).

**Literacy as Local**

Literacy as local has been treated in two ways: the first, that meaning is dependent upon localized, immediate contexts; and the second, that it is created by the practices of the local community, in contrast to a broader, more global culture (Brandt and Clinton, 2002; Street, 1995; 2003). These concepts are related, but distinct. The first involves taking a microscopic look at literacy events, and the second involves taking a wider examination of the patterns that make up the practices of a local community. Smith best
highlighted this difference in her close-up examination of four literacy events at the beginning of the honors class year, but connected her understanding from those events to the practices of the class and school as a whole (2008; 2009).

When meaning is made by people in social situations it is highly localized, and as context varies, so do the literacy practices involved in that context (Street, 1995). For this reason, it is necessary to consider interactions in the form of literacy events. Brandt and Clinton define a literacy event as “social action going on around a piece of writing in which the writing matters to the way people interact” (2002: 342). Literacy events are the observable day-to-day interactions with texts, and it is only through careful study of these events that literacy practices become visible (Purcell-gates, et. al, 2004). An examination of the patterns found in literacy events is what gives insight into cultural literacy practices.

This concept of literacy as a local construct is not intended to imply that it is the location that creates literacy practices, but rather that it is the people who create them within a specific context. In this sense, I am not negating the social nature of literacy, but am addressing the fact that literacy is not merely social and is instead defined by social interactions that take place within a local context. It is important to understand literacy as a local construct because a group of people may have a set of literacy practices for one context but meaning and practices may change based on the context. Texts are used for specific purposes and have specific meanings that vary between events. In Hubbard’s research, students frequently displayed pieces of text on their desks and had specific purposes for them (1989). Some were notes from or to fellow students, but one student had taped M&M wrappers to his desk, with the belief that they may be worth something
someday. A piece of text that was considered trash to most people and in most situations was valuable to these students in this context. Not because it truly had monetary value, but because to this student, it represented a piece of his identity that he could display to others.

Literacy is constructed in local events as participants engage in social interactions and bring their cultural literacy practices to the interactions with others and with texts. Practices are embedded within everyday life and meaning is dependent upon the situation, but many literacy events can be grouped in patterned contexts. Barton and Hamilton categorized these patterned contexts into domains, such as work, school, and home, where practices vary according to context but were predictable within similar events. (Barton, 1991; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; 2000). Some of these domains are embedded within structured institutions, such as religions or schools, and contain very specific literacy practices, such as who is allowed to read from sacred texts and how one is to understand them (Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

Reading and writing are used for real-life purposes and are strongly connected to the needs and values of the community (Heath, 2006; Purcell-Gates, et al., 2004; Street, 1995). Street (1995) identified how the distinct literacy practices of rural Iranian villagers varied greatly from those living in the city, a distinction Heath identified between three geographically close but separate communities in North Carolina (Heath, 2006; Street, 1995). Which texts were used and how they were used depended upon the needs of the local community. Writing is particularly connected to this concept because it is a clear representation of local needs, as the writing is produced by local participants (Barton &
Padmore, 1991). The following section addresses how texts are dependent upon the needs of the local community.

**Literacy as Multiple**

The multiple nature of literacy is strongly tied up in the concept that literacy is a culturally defined construct (Jacobs, 2007; Street, 1995). Literacy practices are embedded within cultural contexts and associated with and depend on shared assumptions within cultures (Barton, 1991; Gee, 1996; Jacobs, 2007). Because different cultures value different forms of knowledge and ways of living, the reading and writing done in those cultures must follow the same rules. Events contain a multiplicity of texts, each of which is defined by set beliefs and values.

Literacy is not a single concept, but rather is often talked about as literacies, where practices vary based on context and are the cultural ways of using reading and writing, based on values and beliefs held by the people engaged in reading and writing (Barton, 1991; Street, 1995; 2003). Part of these practices is the multiple nature of texts associated with changing practices. Because practices are locally and culturally situated, texts used in practices vary based on context and the meanings and values associated with them. Street’s study of rural Iranian communities demonstrated that the reading and writing that went on in the rural communities was based on the needs of the community. For example, in the *maktabs*, children were taught the Quran differently than they were taught how to read and write for business reasons.

Text use and meaning are dictated by cultural practices, and some texts which, are highly prized in one culture may be devalued in another. Different texts are associated with different expectations of behavior and beliefs (Purcell-Gates, et. a., 2004). For
example, because Amish communities highly valued group-centered thinking, children in the community were discouraged from keeping journals and writing about their personal feelings because writing about oneself was viewed as too self-focused (Fishman, 1991). Conversely, mainstream American schools encourage talk about students’ thoughts and created texts as a method for encouraging student growth and writing development (Dyson & Freedman, 2003). Texts in school-based literacy practices are deliberately chosen based on societal and institutional needs (Gee, 1990; Luke & Freebody, 1997). There are certain forms of language that are associated with literacy in schools, such as essay-text writing, that are different from real-life writing (Street, 1984; 1995; 1999).

Schools have certain expectations of how print is used and learned, and sometimes these expectations clash with those of the home culture (Heath, 2006).

The value participants place on texts varies based on the context in which the texts are used. Jacobs saw how students used multiple, newer literacy practices to do school-based work, adapting reading and writing for their own uses (Jacobs, 2007). In the classroom, however, non-academic domains are often not valued, as Heath saw with the literacy practices from Trackton and Roadville (Heath, 2006). These communities’ local practices and newer text formats, such as the text messaging and computer chatting Jacobs observed, are considered acceptable and useful forms of meaning making outside the school, but within the classroom they are devalued and discouraged (Heath, 2006; Jacobs, 2007).

The multiple nature of texts in literacy isn’t about the text themselves, but the meanings associated with them. For the participants in Smith’s (2008) study, the meaning of text varied whether they were the students or teachers. While the teachers felt they
were expressing their expectations for a fully democratic classroom, students used the freedoms they were given to resist the meanings teachers imposed upon them and created their own meanings for texts. Bruna (2007) observed students using text creation as a way of subtly and respectfully indicating their need for help, but the teacher’s meaning differed from theirs, and she interpreted their actions as disrespectful and “off-task.”

People have countless purposes for text creation, including shopping lists, letter writing, and personal writings, and each of these purposes has a distinct significance within a community (Barton & Padmore, 1991; Heath, 2006). In her influential study of two working-class communities in the 1960s and ’70s, Heath observed how the values associated with reading and writing are culturally situated. Reading and writing were very gendered, with women tending to write more than men, engaging in letter-writing, notes and recipe writing (Heath, 2006).

**Literacy as Global**

Much of the New Literacy Studies research has been focused on understanding literacy as a local construct, dependent upon the needs of the involved participants, but this perspective has come under criticism in recent years (Blackburn & Clark, 2007; Brandt & Clinton, 2002). Although there are indeed some practices that are created in the immediate setting, there is a significant interplay between local and more global cultural values, which involve issues of power, access, identity, and the validation of knowledge (Blackburn & Clark, 2007). The term “global” can refer to the concept of worldwide connections, but in this sense it is used to refer to the broader culture as compared to the local community. Literacy practices are not limited to isolated communities because local groups are part of and influenced by broader cultures (Brandt & Clinton, 2002; Hamilton,
2009). Brandt and Clinton (2002) referred to this concept as “distant,” but this term implies these broader cultures are somewhat removed and disconnected from the local community. I instead use the alternate term, global, because of the implications of a broader, yet still connected culture.

Schools are a part of the larger society and “the people who inhabit them do not operate in a vacuum, but rather within the ideology of a larger social sphere” (Smith, 2008: 500). Practices are tied up in issues of power and shaped by rules of who is allowed to produce texts (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Purcell-Gates, et al., 2004; Street, 1995). In schools, there are many rules that dictate children’s reading and writing practices. Writing forms and topics are often imposed upon children and sometimes upon the teachers (Barton, 1991; Street, 1995). Hamilton (2009) found that teachers were expected to use and turn in paperwork that was imposed upon them by broader power structures. Teachers were told this paperwork was vital to their teaching, but while some teachers embraced these practices as being useful, others saw it as a waste of time and completed the papers only because they were required. Even in this, the practices had both a local and global meaning: the texts were imposed upon them and completed in a precise manner, but the texts had varied meaning to individual teachers.

Although local communities have literacy practices of their own, the norm is often determined by the dominant class, which exists within a larger cultural sphere (Purcell-Gates, 2004; Street, 1984; 1995). Heath’s study demonstrated the difficulties the children from Trackton and Roadville had when they entered the Maintown schools and struggled to deal with Maintown practices (Heath, 2006). It was expected that the Trackton and Roadville children would accommodate and learn the Maintown practices,
not the other way around. This was not simply a matter of different local literacies competing for dominance, but rather the expectation that children would ignore their local literacies in favor of a broader, more dominant one. Because of these power struggles, different literacies have different status.

Global literacy practices are often also used to regulate behavior and roles, as participants use instruction in schools to define who counts as holders of knowledge (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Collins & Blot, 2003; Luke & Freebody, 1997). In this sense, literacy practices are used to legitimate the power of the teacher and the authors and negate the power of the child as reader and writer. On a broad scale, the power structures in schools serve to regulate and reify cultures, legitimizing the particular practices and devaluing and marginalizing others (Blackburn & Clark, 2007; Luke & Freebody, 1997; Street, 1999). Because of the global nature of schools, the local power of the community is often taken away, along with the values and beliefs of the local literacy practices (Blackburn & Clark, 2007).

Historically, schools and reading instruction have excluded various practices (Jacobs, 2007; Luke & Freebody, 1997; Purcell-Gates, 2004). Increased recognition of local practices has at times disrupted the valuing of only the dominant literacy (Blackburn & Clark, 2007). As more children from other cultures enter schools and more families enter the communities, there are higher expectations that their literacies will be valued.

**Limitations of Researching Literacy from a New Literacy Studies Framework**

As I addressed in the previous sections, New Literacy Studies research has provided a great deal of insight into how reading and writing are used and valued both in
and across cultures. Over the years, though, there has been a strong focus on communities and home lives but this focus has left a gap in school research. As was discussed in the previous chapter, early sociocultural research addressed classroom literacy practices (e.g. Cochran-Smith, 1984; Street & Street, 1991), but it has been decades since there has been much focus on how classrooms have cultural implications all their own, with their own beliefs and values regarding how texts are used. Current New Literacy Studies research in schools has been focused on finding ways to bring home and outside literacy practices into the classroom (e.g. Hull, & Schultz, 2002). The effort to bridge the gap between home and school literacies is an admirable one, as it can help students succeed academically, but the research does not always address just what those school literacy practices are that need to be changed.

Because schools are institutions set up by a larger culture and often controlled by district, state and national policies, classrooms are sometimes treated as microcosms of broader culture that exist only to reproduce that culture. In this research, I address the concept of classrooms as their own communities, with their own locally-created practices. In focusing on classrooms in this way, I address both the local and global influences that work to create classroom practices.

Curricula are significant influences in classroom literacy practices, but this is one area where researchers have failed to examine from a New Literacy Studies perspective. Because curricular materials are written by one group of people and chosen by another, the values represented in texts may not be those held by classroom participants. Despite past and present classroom research, there has been little, if any, research which questions what values are represented in the curriculum and how those texts affect classroom
literacy practices. In this study, I focused part of my attention on the mandated curriculum texts and how students and teachers used and responded to those texts.

The Hidden Curriculum in Schools

When working from a framework that assumes literacy as embedded within a culture, it stands to reason that as students are learning about literacy in schools, they are also learning about the cultural values and expectations connected to those literacy practices. As was just discussed, classrooms have their own literacy practices, but part of the curricula and classrooms structures are designed to control and reproduce the values and practices of dominant culture (Apple, 2004; Gordon, 1982). Although in the past some curriculum scholars have urged for social justice and equity in schools, historically, the curricula and instruction in schools have been designed to reproduce the current social and cultural structure, including social stratification and the marginalization of certain groups (Anyon, 1980).

Often this purpose of schooling is not overtly addressed in the curriculum, but rather is “hidden” in taken-for-granted assumptions (Booher-Jennings, 2008; Portelli, 1993). This concept of a “hidden curriculum” assumes that like literacy, “education is not a neutral enterprise, but rather it is immersed in ideology, morality, power, cultural control and social reproduction” (Thornberg, 2009: 246). The hidden curriculum socializes children into dominant society through teaching ways of believing and behaving in that society (Cornbleth, 1984; Thornberg, 2009).

There have been several terms have been used for this concept in the past several decades, including “implicit” curriculum, “unintended” curriculum, “unofficial” curriculum and “shadow” curriculum (Brown, 2005; Portelli, 1993). Although each of these terms has a slightly different implication, they are all associated with the assumption that there is a curriculum, not evident to all participants, with specific normative purposes, often representing dominant culture. Because of these similarities, it is easiest to speak of the umbrella term “hidden curriculum”.

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What is a hidden curriculum?

Michael Apple’s description of the hidden curriculum, originally identified by Philip Jackson in 1968, suggests that while schools claim neutrality, there is a covert message in the structure and content of the curriculum that teaches cultural norms and values (Apple, 1975; 2004; Portelli, 1993). This instruction is both implicit and powerful.

Curriculum is not just about what facts are being taught but also about how this information is taught and represented. Apple (2004) has argued that science texts present the path toward scientific understanding as basic, conflict-free developments, following simple lines of change. In reality, scientific discovery has been fraught with fierce professional competition and disagreements both within the scientific world and with convincing the outside world to accept developments. Science textbooks do not describe the painstaking struggles it took to achieve our current understanding. Astronomy curricula describe the universe in factual terms, rarely mentioning the ever-changing nature of our understanding. Society and governments have long been resistant to the implications of great scientific discovery. Crichlow, Goodwin, Shakes & Swartz (1990) describe how the authors of literature pieces are removed from historical contexts and history textbooks present slanted, conflict-free views of the past. When conflict is taught, it is often taught as an “us vs. them” mentality, portraying opponents as one-dimensional.

An excellent example of how the hidden curriculum represents a slanted view of history is that of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott. The story of how Rosa Parks sparked the Montgomery bus boycott is well-known and often used in schools as an inspirational story, but Ms. Parks is often portrayed as a poor, tired woman who stubbornly refused to give her seat to a white man (Kohl, 1991). Kohl found that children
are rarely told that Ms. Parks was a vital part of an organized effort in the civil rights movement. Instead, history textbooks portray her as a hot, tired and stubborn lower class woman whose actions began a spontaneous boycott. They ignore the fact that the boycott had been previously attempted and even this one was carefully planned. This one-sided portrayal represents a particular point of view that, although it describes the influential actions of the African-American community, places them as angry but disorganized and the White community as powerful and finally “giving in” to their demands.

Conflict in schools is represented as fundamentally bad and disciplines are taught with an eye toward encouraging consensus and maintaining current society (Apple, 1975; Crichlow, et. al, 1990). This normative moral component is often one of the most significant aspects of the hidden curriculum (Thornberg, 2009). Stories and vignettes display moral decisions and teach students how they are supposed to behave and think in different situations. What values students should hold and how they should behave and even think are woven through texts (Brown, 2005; Thornberg, 2009). The hidden curriculum serves not to transform society into something better, but rather to perpetuate existing society, with all its inequalities (Cornbleth, 1984; Brown, 2005).

As was noted above, literacy practices are tied up in cultural values and beliefs, which are passed on in schools through teachers and the texts they use. These attitudes are often part of the hidden curriculum, either intentionally or unintentionally obscured to participants.

*What does the hidden curriculum look like in schools?*

One of the basic purposes of hidden curriculum research is to understand what messages are embedded within the school system and the classroom (Thornberg, 2009).
The prescribed curriculum is written with basic assumptions about children, including previous and expected future experiences (Dutro, 2010). Decisions are made about what knowledge is valuable and what children are expected to know. Students are expected to fall in line with curricular expectations (Apple, 2004; Hamilton, 2009). Just as certain forms of text are valued over others, certain perspectives or pieces of knowledge are valued over others in the curriculum and in schools. Scholars see curriculum from a value-laden perspective and work to understand the meanings behind what was being taught in the classrooms (Portelli, 1993). Curriculum needs to be recognized as a “symbolic representation of the world and society” (Crichlow, et. al, 1990: 101). In addition to teaching students factual information, schools are also passing along assumptions of what is normal in society (Apple, 2004).

Schools are designed to control and reproduce the values and practices of dominant culture (Apple, 2004; Brown, 2005; Gordon, 1982). This reproduction does not exist only in the curriculum materials but also in the basic structure of schools and classrooms, including rules, teaching methods and how students are treated (Booher-Jennings, 2008). The way meanings and practices are organized in schools teaches children social and economic norms and expectations, often connected to middle-class assumptions and values (Dutro, 2010; Hamilton, 2009).

Not all schools represent the same expectations, however, and this is how they serve to reproduce inequalities (Anyon, 1980; Cornbleth, 1984; Thornberg, 2009). Jean Anyon’s foundational research revealed four strata of schools, based on socio-economic status, wherein the expectations in the schools varied based on the expectations of the students’ role in life (Anyon, 1980). Students in wealthier schools were expected to
become CEOs and businesspeople and so were given many choices and expected to think in great abstractions. Students from fewer means were given few choices and were expected only to follow instructions and get the correct answer, being groomed for the factory jobs their parents held.

Thirty years have passed since Anyon’s study, but recent scholars have found that these inequalities persist, not only in the expectations being expressed but also in how students respond to those expectations (Brown, 2005; Thornberg, 2009). Dutro (2010) found a disconnect between children’s lives and what they read in their curricular materials. Students read stories that described characters’ “hard times” in terms of sudden disasters that marred previously comfortable homes and could be overcome by community effort, but the students’ lives were riddled with systemic poverty that was not so easily fixed. Although some culturally marginalized students are visually represented in materials, the values represented tend to be middle-class values (Brown, 2005). As was previously noted, “education is not a neutral enterprise, but rather, it is immersed in ideology, morality, power, cultural control and social reproduction” (Thornberg, 2009: 246). Schools often use rules to socialize children to moral expectations and power structures, and these expectations represent strong ideologies (Thornberg, 2009).

Messages embedded within the hidden curriculum

When examining schools and what they teach, it is important to consider what cultural influences drive the curriculum (Wren, 1999). As Brown noted, curricula “contain messages about what is true, what is right and what behaviors and thinking students should engage in” (2005: 126). Students are not just being taught information, mere facts, but they are also being taught what values to hold, how to act and even how
they should think (Ahearn, 2004). In her examination of government-mandated textbooks in Nepal, Ahearn (2004) identified themes of nationalism, age and gender hierarchies and a valuing of Hinduism over other religions. Newer texts geared toward women’s education had strong themes of societal development, capitalism and the “correct” way to live.

When texts and curricula are designed for schools, decisions are made based on what children are expected to know (Dutro, 2010; Hamilton, 2009). These expectations are not always the same for all groups. As Brown (2005) noted, the language of business is deeply embedded in schooling, but the goals of business are not always the same as those of teachers. While some subjects are left out, others are highlighted. Numerous scholars have noted the difference in what literacy practices are valued in schools and what are valued in the home (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Heath, 2006; Street, 1995). As noted above, the literacy practices valued in schools represent a number of beliefs and values, which are passed on to students. Schools tend to have large numbers of rules and behavioral expectations students are expected to follow, socializing children into authoritarian routines (Thornberg, 2009). Students are taught to follow these sets of rules, which often come from adults and are represented textually (Thornberg, 2009). Students learn that they are to treat texts as having the same authority as the adults in their lives.

Not only are texts used to demonstrate authority and expectations of behavioral conformity, but some texts are used to demonstrate attitudes regarding the abilities and responsibilities of both teachers and students (Rowan, Camburn & Correnti, 2004). Curricular mandates often come from district or state levels and therefore represent expectations about both teachers and students (Brown, 2005; Dutro, 2010). Curricula that
have scripts for what the teachers should say represent a “deskillling” of teachers (Dutro, 2010; Rowan, et. al, 2010). When teachers are required to follow curricula that have little room for variation, teachers can learn that their skills and choices are not valued. These materials also often provide responses for students, limiting what is considered an appropriate response. When teachers follow these texts, lessons are rigidly controlled and students learn that there are appropriate and inappropriate ways of responding to texts.

These attitudes being passed on to students are represented not only in curricular materials but also in teachers’ talk. In researching test-taking in elementary schools, Booher-Jennings (2008) found there was a gender divide in teachers’ achievement ideology. While teachers emphasized girls’ abilities when they succeeded, boys’ successes were attributed to hard work. Boys were assumed to be lower achieving because of misbehavior and lack of effort and when they succeeded it was because they had worked hard, not because of innate abilities. Booher-Jennings found that by high school, students had internalized this assumption of where their success lay in this particular form of text.

Researchers who have studied the messages embedded in classroom curricula and practices have helped educators stop and consider how and what children are being taught, but there are still large gaps in the existing research.

Limitations of the existing research

Most research on the hidden curriculum presents it as a negative force, of which students and teachers should be made aware and resist. Some educators have argued that having a definite, socializing purpose to schools isn’t inherently bad, depending on what values are being taught (Good, 1999). As far back as the early 20th century, Dewey
encouraged the development of schools that would be agents of change, encouraging
more democratic society (Good, 1999). These curricula can be potentially liberating and
serve as a catalyst for change (Cornbleth, 1984). When the curriculum is designed to
enable students to develop autonomy and cultural capital, they are able to question
existing norms and be critical of the expectations they encounter (Cornbleth, 1984; Good,
1999).

One problem with the concept of a “good” intended hidden curriculum is that for
something to be democratic, it must be evident. If educators simply replace one hidden
curriculum for another, they are merely socializing children to their own moral and
cultural assumptions, not creating a democratic space. A democratic curriculum is not
one that says “here’s what it says and why it’s bad.” Rather, in a democratic classroom,
children are invited to examine the curriculum and decide for themselves what they will
and will not accept.

Some of the assumptions of the hidden curriculum are that participants are
unaware of the curriculum. While this is sometimes the case, it can also be that students
and teachers are aware of the values and expectations in the schools and curricula
(Portelli, 1993). This awareness can bring about a number of responses. Some teachers
and students will “go along” with expectations in order to gain advantages within the
system (Thornberg, 2009). Others may find ways of defying school values (Fowler,
2008). In this research, I questioned whether or not teachers were aware of the messages
in both the curriculum and their instruction and how students responded to those
messages.
Much of the hidden curriculum research is focused on teachers, student teachers, college students and high school students. Although elementary school is a key place where students learn literacy practices and the values associated with school, little attention has been paid specifically to the hidden curriculum in elementary school classrooms. In this research, I tried to address this gap by examining the messages embedded within a second-grade curriculum.

Both New Literacy Studies and hidden curriculum perspectives are based on the concept that texts are not neutral, but rather are connected to the values of those who interact with them. Although there are some distinct differences, these two perspectives are strongly connected in theory. Both are focused on understanding how texts are laden with messages and affected by social and cultural values. These two theoretical perspectives, however, have never been used as part of the same study. In this research, with a New Literacy Studies perspective, I questioned what hidden curricula were in the assigned curriculum and the teachers’ instruction.

Implicit in the concept of the hidden curriculum is that students are passive and helpless recipients of cultural messages (Cornbleth, 1984). On the contrary, as I discussed in the New Literacy Studies section, students are active participants in meaning-making. Although they are still shaped and influenced by their culture, social experiences and school practices, meaning is constructed by the social interactions in which they participate (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Luke & Freebody, 1997; Street, 1999; Thornberg, 2009). Students report feelings of having little choices in schools, sensing a “teacher knows best” attitude (Thornberg, 2009). This assumption that students lack awareness of what they are being taught is a significant limitation to the prevailing literature. Some
students may be aware of the hidden curriculum, but the fact they choose to accept it does
not mean they are passive dupes. During my research, I chose to focus on students and
teachers as co-meaning-makers, albeit in unequal relationships, in the classrooms. In
focusing on the hidden curriculum while also addressing the concept of participants as
active meaning-makers, teachers and students were not treated as passive receptors of the
hidden curriculum, but as negotiators of the messages in texts.

Agency

One of the purposes of revealing and challenging the hidden curriculum is to draw
attention to the freedoms, or lack thereof, felt by students and teachers. When the hidden
curriculum represents attitudes of who is in control, issues of agency arise. The most
basic definition of agency is the ability to act decisively and deliberately to achieve one’s
own desires. Having a sense of agency means a person senses that her own actions affect
the environment around her and having the ability to use available resources to meet
one’s needs (Johnston, 2004; Moore, 2008; Wassell, Hawrylak, & Levan, 2010).

Not only does agency involve being able to use resources to meet one’s needs,
but it also involves feeling one has the right and ability to make such choices and
deciding what resource to use or reject. Having a sense of agency is a fundamental human
desire that gives one a sense of empowerment. Ahearn (2004) found that as women
developed literacy practices, there was a change in how they saw their ability to act and
be responsible for the events around them.

Lacking the freedom to make choices leaves people feeling as though their actions
have no effect on their environment (Johnston, 2004; Mills, 2007). Classrooms tend to
have a “teacher knows best” attitude, and teachers have the power over students
(Thornberg, 2009). Children are often expected to conform to the rules without much say in the creation of the rules. Although power relations favor the teacher, students are able to exert their agency in various ways, through resistance of rules or refusal to comply with expectations (Mills, 2007). When college students were assigned texts they felt were unnecessary or written in an insulting manner, they reacted with derision and chose not to read the texts (Fowler, 2008). When teachers feel a sense of agency, they feel the freedom they pick and choose what curricular resources they wish to use and reject, including adding to the provided curriculum (MacCleod, 2004; Moore, 2008; Rowan, et. al, 2004).

This definition of agency is generally more basic than the one most researchers use. As people do not live or act within an isolated vacuum, their actions affect and influence others and agency research needs to reflect that (Johnston, 2004). Children are social actors with valid experiences that affect the world around them (Smith, 2009). Learning environments are fundamentally social, so when teachers or students make decisions, the results of those decisions affect those around them. In addition, when people lack a sense of agency, those around them play a role in either encouraging or hindering a developing sense of agency (Gutstein, 2007). Some teachers have used students’ writings or their own conversations with students to guide students to better own their work and see their role in their successes (Brown, 2009; Johnston, 2004). Because of these issues, much research on agency includes a social component and addresses whether or not other participants also feel a sense of agency and how participants affect one another’s’ sense of agency.
When researchers talk about agency, there are different definitions and issues they address. The most basic is the personal sense of agency one feels about one’s own actions, agent of self. Two others, feeling the need to help another develop his or her own sense of agency and using one’s own agency to bring about broader social change, I use the term agent of change, initially identified in Moore (2004). The following sections address the differences and implications of each area of focus.

*Agent of self*

Much agency research begins on an assumption that all people inherently possess agency (Alexander, 2005; MacCleod, 2004). People begin to recognize that their actions affect those around them in infancy, as is evident when babies repeat actions just to see what will happen (Johnston, 2004). As children grow, they learn through their unique experiences what freedoms they have and do not have. When they enter school, they bring their own agency narratives into the classroom which are either challenged or supported. Although Heath was not explicitly studying agency, her study of Trackton children’s experiences demonstrated that their agency was challenged once they entered Maintown elementary schools (Heath, 2006). Children’s choices and freedoms were limited and controlled in ways they had not previously experienced. MacCleod (2004) described teachers’ attempts to address students’ narratives in the classrooms through written and oral presentations in order to enhance students’ feelings of power.

When people act as agents for themselves, they make decisions they feel will benefit or advance themselves. According to Alexander (2005), the term agency means people “have the freedom within reasonable limits to choose their beliefs, desires and actions, the intelligence to distinguish between better and worse according to some
conception of these notions, and the capacity to make mistakes in what they believe, feel and do” (Alexander, 2005: 344). Smith (2009) found that when children are denied the opportunity to make choices for themselves, they are denied the opportunity to make mistakes and learn how to be responsible for their own actions.

At times, teachers may feel a sense of what Hamilton (2009) called “surface autonomy,” where they had some hint of agency, but in reality much was controlled by outside forces. When teachers feel a sense of agency in their own work, they feel empowered to make decisions in the classroom and access resources (Gutstein, 2007; Smith, 2007). MacCleod’s (2004) description of teachers’ attempts to become familiar with children’s community practices and bring them into the classroom not only displays their interest in developing students’ agency but also demonstrates that they had a sense of agency enough to alter the curriculum and move beyond the traditional role of teacher. Similarly, when students feel a personal sense of agency, they feel the freedom to choose how they will use the texts they encounter in their day-to-day lives. Ahearn (2004) found that as Nepali women developed literacy practices, they used the texts they created to change their cultural practices. Fowler (2008) described students blatantly ignoring signs on which rules were posted because they felt the wording was inappropriate or insulting.

When children enter school and encounter unfamiliar situations, their sense of their own agency may be altered either to enhance or limit it. Wassell, et. al (2010) found that English language learners’ felt a limited sense of agency when they entered the classroom and lacked the ability to access the resources they needed. Lacking this strong sense of being agents of themselves, they may interpret their successes as the effect of outside forces, rather than their own. The passive sense of “this is good because the
teacher helped me” indicates the students do not feel that their actions affect the world around them (Johnston, 2004).

Even though studies of agency that focus on students tend to portray teachers as powerful participants reinforcing dominant culture (e.g. Fowler, 2008; Wassell, et. al, 2010), often it is more possible that teachers either feel a constrained sense of agency or no agency at all due to the numerous power structures that encroach upon the classroom (Mills, 2007; Moore, 2008). Because one of the responsibilities teachers have is to maintain order, teachers and students are at times placed in adversarial relationships and teachers are expected to “control” students (Gutstein, 2007). Not only does this limit students’ ability to make choices, but it also can limit teachers’ freedoms, because they may feel so focused on addressing behavioral needs and requirements they don’t feel they have the opportunity to create more democratic spaces. Teachers are also very likely to feel constrained by institutional expectations, not only in teacher-student interactions but also in available resources. Mills (2007) described Australian teachers’ and administrators’ feelings of being limited through budgeting and limited curricular resources. In addition, the current climate of high-stakes testing limits teachers’ options and constrains their choices (Gutstein, 2007).

Students’ agency is often limited and their perspectives devalued by outside structures and beliefs (Smith, 2009). When those in power assume children are unable to make the “right” decisions, those decisions are taken away from them (Smith, 2008). Doing so not only denies children the opportunity to make choices, even if they are the wrong ones, but it also teaches them that they cannot be trusted to choose for themselves.
When children grow up feeling this way, they will struggle to exert their own agency as adults, because they will feel they do not have any (Smith, 2009).

Rather than be seen as active meaning-makers in a community, students are often seen as passive recipients of texts and teachers’ actions (Fowler, 2008). Freire first introduced this concept in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), which he described as the banking model of education, in which knowledge is transmitted to students, who acquire deposits of knowledge into otherwise empty minds. In this perspective, students are receptors of information who only react to teachers’ actions, not initiating their own. Quite the contrary, students often exercise their own agency in subtle ways, sometimes through deliberately choosing not to engage with texts or classroom interactions (Fowler, 2008; Smith, 2008). When Fowler (2008) studied the literacy practices of college students who were assumed to lack the needed literacy skills for success, she found that quite the opposite. Students were not passive recipients of text or of power structures, but instead used their literacy practices to negotiate the powerful structures. Although the students were deciding what texts to engage in based on what they considered valuable, teachers and tutors assumed the students didn’t read the texts because the language was inaccessible. Smith’s (2008) observations of how students exerted their agency by resisting teachers’ definitions of how an honor student should behave. Despite the fact that students did not use their agency in the manner teachers expected, they exercised their agency to participate actively in literacy practices on their own terms and to challenge dominant discourses.

*Agent of change*
Encouraging a sense of agency in others has strong elements in social justice. In fact, numerous researchers work from the assumption that agency must inherently be used to further social change (Gutstein, 2007; Moore, 2008). According to this view, “agency is the conscious role we choose to play in helping people bring about social change for the collective benefit of all” (Moore, 2008: 591). This stance is tied up in ethical or moral stances that hearken back to the concept of hidden curriculum. In fact, Gutstein (2007) quotes Freire’s stance that “education should always be linked to broader social movements to serve struggles for humanity and liberation from oppression” (421).

While when one is an agent of self, the focus is inward and on personal advancement and benefit, when one becomes an agent of change, the focus is external. A person acting as an agent of change is interested in helping others develop their own personal sense of agency. Because meaning is constantly being negotiated among others within unequal power structures, personal sense of agency will naturally be affected by other participants, either positively or negatively (Johnston, 2004; Moore, 2008; Smith, 2009). When people feel they can be agents of themselves, their focus may turn outward to whether or not others have their own strong sense of agency. Because teachers are already in positions of educating students and preparing them for society, teachers with a strong sense of agency may be led help students develop their own sense of agency. These efforts can be difficult at times, as teachers do not have full autonomy in classrooms. Administration policies can hinder and constrain teachers’ efforts (Gutstein, 2007).

Numerous studies have described teachers using their agency to encourage students to develop their own sense of agency (e.g. Gutstein, 2007; MacCleod, 2004;
Moore, 2008). These efforts can be quite explicit, such as teachers using verbal
interactions with students to point out their strategic actions in order to highlight
students’ agentive role in their successes (Johnston, 2004). At times they are more subtle,
almost as if the teachers themselves are instituting a hidden curriculum of student agency.
MacCleod (2004) described teachers’ efforts to bring students’ home worlds into the
classrooms. Although they changed how they viewed and treated students, they did not
make the reason for their efforts visible to students. Teachers’ efforts to change
classroom interactions (Gutstein, 2007; Wassell, et. al, 2010), curriculum structures
(Moore, 2008) and literacy events (MacCleod, 2004) were designed to encourage
students to feel free to demonstrate their own agency, but did not always make the intent
clear to students.

When teachers work to help students develop their own sense of agency, they
must first attempt to understand what narratives children bring into the classroom
(MacCleod, 2004). As was noted above, children are members of cultural groups that
have their own literacy practices and may or may not be similar to the literacy practices
and narratives represented in schools (Johnston, 2004). When English language learners
enter school, not only do they have to work to learn required content and a new language,
but they also have to learn the cultural practices associated with school. Mills (2007)
found that students were ethnically marginalized because they were required to use
English but couldn’t fully express their needs. They were expected to proofread and use
moderately correct English in texts, but wrote in their own verbal syntax.

In order to help students learn the cultural values of schools so they can assert
their own agency, teachers first need to learn the cultures with which students’ most
identify (MacCleod, 2004; Wassell, et. al, 2010). Knowing where students are coming from can help them enable students to learn to negotiate classroom expectations.

MacCleod (2004) describes teachers’ attempts to understand students’ home cultures and bring it into the classroom through student-led literacy events. In addition, teachers need to understand where they themselves are coming from, their home cultures and the school culture in which the students are entering.

When teachers see themselves as agents for social change, they believe it is their responsibility to encourage students to both understand and examine the practices in schools, including the hidden values and beliefs embedded within schools and the curricula (Gutstein, 2007; Moore, 2008). One reason for this is based on the belief that once children learn the hidden rules, they will be able to negotiate them and have better success in schools (MacCleod, 2004). Another purpose, however, is not so children can better follow the hidden rules in school, but so they can challenge and change the rules (Gutstein, 2007). When students feel a sense of agency in the classroom, they recognize that their perspectives are valued and that they have the right to challenge and critique social issues they encounter (Gutstein, 2007; Smith, 2009). Gutstein (2007) described teachers’ efforts to create a space to encourage students to analyze their social world and how it affected them. Students discussed the numerous gentrification projects in their neighborhood and how different groups were changing their neighborhoods.

**Constraints to agency**

Even though teachers may desire to facilitate children’s agency development, they too may be constrained by other forces that hinder their efforts. Students and teachers have to contend with power structures that control classroom structures and content.
(Gutstein, 2007; Mills, 2007). As was discussed in the hidden curriculum section, these classroom structures and content are often connected to more dominant cultural values and power structures.

Dominant cultural values represent certain attitudes about children, especially students who are marginalized either by perceived ability and ethnicity (Fowler, 2008; MacCleod, 2004; Wassell, et. a., 2010). Current education structures tend to place marginalized students in a deficit model, placing the blame for their struggles on them and their parents (Wassell, et. al, 2010). Students in British Further Education colleges—similar to community or vocational schools in the US—were assumed to lack the needed literacy skills to succeed (Fowler, 2008). Because of these assumptions that students were a homogeneous low-achieving group, tutors and teachers’ actions were guided by those assumptions. Similarly, when English language learners struggle in the classroom, teachers interpret their lack of participation as being due to apathy, rather than the sense of disempowerment and limited agency (Wassell, et. al, 2010). As such, students are marginalized and their efforts are ignored or misunderstood.

Students’ agency is often limited by more dominant power structures, including teachers, policies, and how teachers use curricular texts (Gutstein, 2007; Mills, 2007). Their perspectives have been devalued in favor of dominant ideas (Smith, 2009). Becoming an agent of change in the classroom does not only involve seeing students as agents of themselves and encouraging student agency; it also involves encouraging students to see the power structures and cultural practices around them. Much of this relates to making the hidden curriculum visible to challenge and critique (MacCleod, 2004). For scholars researching from this perspective, agency isn’t as simple as making
choices for one’s own benefit, or even making choices to support other individuals’ developing agency; rather, agency is “the conscious role we choose to play in helping people bring about social change” (Moore, 2008: 591). Being an agent of change involves having a sense of social responsibility, that one is expected not only to work to help individuals around them develop agency, but also use their agency to help bring about a more democratic society (Moore, 2008). This is sometimes a necessary step, as when students try to exercise their own agency, they come up against powerful structures that push back, enforcing dominant ideologies that prevent them from making their own choices (Gutstein, 2007). These limitations to student and teacher agency often come from outside forces that encroach upon classroom structures and practices. It is important for researchers to focus more on how teachers and students contend against these forces and develop their own agency within the classroom.

Limits of agency research

The current research on student and teacher agency has provided significant insight into how teachers can work to make classrooms more democratic and better enable their students to become agents of themselves and their learning. There are still some gaps in the current work, however.

Efforts to enable students and teachers to become agents of themselves and of change are rooted in democratic and moral stances. When researchers and teachers attempt to change classroom practices, they are making assumptions about what values should be embedded within the curriculum. These moral expectations of agency development bring about the question of whether they are bringing about true agency or simply enacting another hidden curriculum. When teachers and researchers work to help
children develop their own sense of agency, they need to examine their stance and what they expect of students. If teachers expect students to use their agency to a specific end—such as to change society—there is a question of whether or not this is true agency. In order to encourage students to develop and use their agency, the hidden curriculum needs to be explicit and teachers need to be aware that students may not make the choices they expect. I sought to understand teachers’ perspectives on their own and students’ agency, and what values they associated with these expectations.

In researching teacher agency and how teachers are agents of their students, it is important to consider how teachers’ agency can be constrained at times by school policies. Often in research, the policies are described, as are teachers’ methods for negotiating these policies, but there is little attention on what precisely those policies look like in classrooms and how curricula are part of the constraining policies. Throughout my study, I focused on how outside policies and structures affected teacher agency in the classroom. I also addressed messages in the curriculum and how the mandated curriculum influenced student and teacher agency.

Although teacher agency has been examined, research on children’s agency in the classroom tends to be focused on middle and high school students, ignoring elementary school children’s agency. Elementary school classrooms tend to be highly structured, with a strong teacher- and district-directed curriculum. Gutstein stated that “we do not know enough about how to create conditions for students to develop a genuine sense of agency” (2007: 425). One reason we do not know enough is because there has not been enough research on it. In this study, I sought to understand how second graders
understood their own agency in their classrooms and how teachers worked to enable or constrain this agency.

Contributions of this study

Thus far I have described three related areas of research, describing not only where the current research is focused, but also pointing out areas where the research is lacking. This study addressed how all three concepts play out in two elementary school classrooms and fills in some of the gaps in current research. In focusing on school classrooms and instruction as social constructions, this research project school as its own unique local community. Within this local community are global practices and I examined how schools are affected by these forces and what values and beliefs children are learning.

In this study, I addressed the question of what literacy practices exist in two second-grade classrooms and what values were within those practices. This proved to be a complex issue, because while classroom participants played a strong part in the creation of practices, outside participants have an effect as well, through policies, classroom structure and curricula. While these outside forces have been somewhat addressed in agency and hidden curriculum research, they have been neglected in New Literacy Studies research. In addition, curricula that were mandated and often representative of those outside forces has not been studied in-depth in recent years by hidden curriculum researchers and not at all by New Literacy Studies researchers.
A significant issue is whether or not the ideologies within the classrooms are visible and intended by the participants, particularly the teachers who create most of the classroom structure. Under the New Literacy Studies framework, I identified the hidden curriculum in both the assigned curriculum and the enacted instruction in the classroom. Students, however, were not passive recipients of instruction, but were active participants in meaning-making, so I also conducted this research with an eye toward understanding whether or not they felt a sense of agency in their lives.
Chapter 3: Research and Methodology

I wanted to understand how the students and teachers in both classrooms understood and defined the concept of literacy, and the ethnographic perspective is about presenting an understanding of reality from the participants’ perspectives (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2006; Lillis, 2008). This methodology was about description, not evaluation; since early in the last century, ethnography has been about describing what is, not what should be (Bredo, 2006; Green, et al., 2003). To do this, I needed to go beyond a description of actions and rituals and dig deeper to examine what beliefs and values were guiding the classroom practices. Because of this theoretical standpoint, the concept of understanding culture through participants’ perspective was an ideal frame for the theoretical standpoint that literacy is defined by participants. Researching literacy in schools from an ethnographic perspective allowed me to examine how participants used reading and writing to make meaning in their daily lives and what meanings are hidden.

The purpose of ethnography is not just about gaining information from participants; ethnographers also try to understand cultural issues the participants themselves may not be able to articulate. Researchers cannot always rely on participants to identify the unspoken rules that govern behavior; it takes someone unfamiliar with the culture to be able to see what participants take for granted (Green, et al., 2003; Lillis, 2008). Many beliefs are so deep-seated that members do not articulate them (Street, 1995). When Godley (2003) learned that the role of debater was highly gendered, it was not because the students had said it but rather that she noticed the patterns and dug deeper.
to understand the driving force behind the patterns. As an outsider and the researcher, my perspective played a strong role in data collection and analysis. Observations and analysis were primarily from my point of view, but my intent was to present my understanding of the participants’ perspectives.

Participants

Selection of participants

I began my search for a research site by looking for schools that fit a set of criteria. Living in Middletown, a mid-sized Midwestern city, I sought an elementary school in an economically disadvantaged area with some racial diversity. I made these choices because participants who had had different experiences and had come from different homes were likely to bring with them different values that would affect the creation of classroom literacy values.

Schools in Middletown were all expected to follow the same reading curriculum, but based on what their adequate yearly progress is, there is some latitude in how much they are expected to follow it. Because of my interest in how teachers use and change the curriculum based on their own practices, I wanted a school where teachers had some of this freedom.

I began by contacting principals whose schools fit my criteria and was welcomed by the principal of Clayton Elementary who put me in touch with two of her three second-grade teachers, Donna Morris and Susan Richards. I chose second grade specifically because state standardized tests begin in third grade. Second grade teachers are not as focused on it as upper elementary grades, but there is still a significant amount of pressure on the teachers, which is passed to the students, to prepare for the tests.
Description of the school

On my daily drive to Clayton Elementary School, I passed old, red brick homes with large, open lawns. As I crossed over the highway that bisects the city, the change was visible. The houses were much smaller and closer together, with tiny lawns and some chain-link fences. Clayton Elementary was located in this neighborhood. Most children came from working-class homes, but many also encountered the threat of poverty and crime. Both Donna and Susan had had students whose families moved to homeless shelters.

Clayton Elementary School is classified as a high poverty, with 82% of its 305 students being eligible for free and reduced lunch last year. With a continuous improvement designation, teachers feel the pressure to prepare their students to pass standardized tests. Although the school met their adequate yearly progress (AYP) measure, their performance index has steadily decreased over the last three years, indicating they had not made enough progress.

Description of teachers

Donna

Donna Morris had been a teacher for over 30 years, mostly in Middletown City Schools. She began her teaching in special education, at a time when there were little resources for students with special needs. Because of this lack, Donna’s early teaching experiences taught her to be creative and more focused on students’ needs than the curriculum requirements.

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2 According to the state report card, “high poverty schools are those ranked in the top quartile based on the percentage of economically disadvantaged students.” (Source withheld to protect anonymity)
Growing up, Donna remembered the use of text being restricted to specific contexts and “it wasn’t really pointed out all the different places that I could, or that it was reading.” Early school reading was limited to fairy tales, with home and school texts being strictly separate. Other than being read one bedtime story when she was young and having a small personal book collection, reading was a taken-for-granted part of life and not encouraged as a pleasurable pastime.

Gradually, Donna’s personal beliefs regarding literacy changed with her experiences. When she began teaching special needs students she saw that students could “read but not understand” or only understood certain forms of text, so she realized that literacy is not a flat, uniform concept, but rather a fluid, ever-changing part of a person’s life. Donna saw herself as “not a done product” and was constantly learning and growing as a literate person. Because of her view of herself as a learner, Donna tried to express to her students that “I don't perceive myself as king, queen, president, any of that. And I tell 'em that.” Rather than set herself up as the absolute authority, she demonstrated to her students that there were things she could learn from them.

When her son was young, she recognized that motivation was a key to his learning and that both her son and her students felt motivated when they felt empowered. Texts had to have meaning and purpose for students to care enough to read and to go to the trouble of learning to read. This empowerment took the form of students recognizing that they could use text to suit their own needs but also in knowing that they had the ability to help someone else learn to use texts. Donna saw a complex social dynamic in her classroom and encouraged students to help one another, in part because it demonstrated to them that everyone had strengths and weaknesses.
Over three decades, Donna saw a lot of change go through the school system, and experienced some curricula that greatly constrained teachers and others that gave a lot of freedom. At the time of my research, Donna saw herself as a professional trying to teach her students and give them what they need but was constrained by testing requirements and students’ disadvantaged backgrounds.

Susan Richards had been teaching elementary school for 13 years, initially in middle school until she moved to teach first and second grades. Coming from an affluent area of the city, her students’ lives were something of a surprise to her and she struggled at times to know how to best meet their needs. She described her childhood as “apparently spoiled” because “I just thought life was great. Everybody has a wonderful family, everybody wants to go to school, everybody's going to college.”

When Susan began teaching, she tried to remember her early reading instruction, but for the most part, she had memories of being in whole group instruction, reading assigned stories and being divided into ability groups. Among her clearest memories was recognizing that she was in the middle ability group and wanting to be in the “special,” higher group.

Susan’s teaching education consisted mostly of teaching phonics and following the assigned teacher’s manual. Small groups were encouraged “but I remember it was a lot of emphasis on just, whatever our district is doing, that’s what you have to try.” Despite wanting to help every student become successful, Susan often felt that she lacked the resources and had to sacrifice her philosophy of teaching to every student’s needs.
along with certain curricular expectations because of time constraints and students’ achievement levels.

Her first experiences teaching were “shocking” because she felt unprepared for dealing with the experiences her students had and how different they were from her own. Susan struggled with knowing how to address the poverty and hunger some of her students experience and felt her best choice was to “try to treat ‘em like normal children and teach ‘em what I think they should know.” When she began having children, she started to consider how she treated her students and tried to treat them as she would treat her own, with a greater level of empathy. One of her ultimate goals was for her students to be able to look back on their experience with her and remember that she cared about them.

Susan recognized that one of her difficulties as a teacher was being consistent with rules and expectations. Although she said students were allowed to help one another, she preferred a quiet class, particularly when she was engaged with a small group. Having taught most students in both first and second grades, Susan believed she had the task of helping students transition from kindergarten and first grade to third grade, so she tried not to “mother” them as much as she did last year.

*Representation of the teachers*

As I began observing Donna and Susan, I found myself identifying more with Donna than with Susan. This led to some personal conflict because I have tried to represent both of them faithfully and honestly. It was never my intent to evaluate the teachers and I have tried to not appear as though I judged them for their efforts. It may
come across that way sometimes because this study deals with sensitive issues that address the hidden meanings within the classrooms they call their own.

My impression of both teachers was that they had a sincere desire to teach their students how to read and succeed in schools and in life, but did not always feel they had the resources to do so. Some of the resources they felt they lacked were material, but many other times they recognized they did not have the time, experience and help to address all their students’ needs. Being at a more experienced stage in her teaching, Donna had developed deeper awareness of what literacy was and how it related to her students. On the other hand, she was at a point when she felt confident in her perspective and teaching and was not always open to deeper questioning. Susan, in some ways, was still adjusting to the very different lifestyles her students led in comparison to her own childhood and although she tried to add things in her class that she thought her students would like, often felt overwhelmed with dealing with classroom management and helping her students through some very difficult experiences.

*Description of students*

The teachers initially introduced me and my purpose and following parental permission, I reintroduced who I was, explained what I would be doing in their classroom and why, and requested verbal consent from the students. I sent home permission forms on two separate occasions, to maximize return. Following the principal’s and teachers’ consent³, I began observing in the classrooms and sent home parental permission forms with each child. I initially observed only the teachers’ actions, until I began receiving parental permission and student consent.

³ See Appendices H-J for teacher consent, parent permission and student assent forms.
Donna’s class had between 20 and 22 students through the year, the variability being due to some students moving in and out. For most of the time, there were 21 students: 7 girls and 14 boys. Of these students, 9 were White, 2 were Latino and 10 were Black (a few students had White family members but identified as Black). All students spoke only English. Ten students in Donna’s class returned signed forms and became the focus of my observations, 4 girls, 1 who was White and 3 were Black; and 6 boys, 3 of whom were White, 2 Black and 1 Latino.

Most of the year, Susan’s class had 20 students: 11 girls and 9 boys. Of these students, 11 were White and 9 were Black. Eleven students returned permission forms: 7 girls, two of whom were Black and 5 White; and 4 boys: two White and two Black. One of the White boys moved away early in the school year, so was part of my initial observations, but not present for most of them.

Students came from a spectrum of socioeconomic backgrounds and there was a wide variety of family structure. Some students lived with both parents or one parent and a stepparent; others lived with one or both grandparents or other family members. Donna told me several students had loved ones or family members in prison or struggling with various forms of substance abuse. Both teachers had some students whose families would likely be considered middle class and others who struggled with homelessness.

Both Donna and Susan expressed frustration at times due to parents’ perceived lack of willingness or ability to help their children. Donna described to me an instance when a parent did not want her child to take books home because they had no place for them and they thought the younger ones would tear them up. One student in Susan’s class frequently came in late, which his stepfather attributed to his watching too much TV in
the morning and Susan was frustrated that his parents did not make him turn off the TV to get to school in time. On the other hand, she had another parent who felt he had a poor literacy background and spoke to Susan about wanting more for his child. “I think they want more for their children to be successful, but a lot of them don’t know how.” Susan sympathized with this sentiment. “I think if I wasn’t a teacher, I would be struggling with what am I supposed to be doing with my child?” She has had several parents check with her to make sure she isn’t just passing failing students along, which was what had happened to them. Some parents made a point to instill their children’s lives with text, making regular library trips, giving books as presents, and searching for information in books and on the Internet.

Focal students

One way to make studies more manageable is the use of focal students, where the researcher chooses certain students to focus on depending on what the researcher is interested in. Bruna (2007) and Grote (2006) both chose students based on their minority and often marginalized status in the classroom and society. Hubbard (1989) chose focal students but still maintained a broader focus on the entire class. After a six-week period of observation, Godley (2003) chose her students so they represented the diversity of the class. Most researchers choose to observe before choosing focal students or refining questions because of the importance of focusing on what is important to the members, rather than making choices based on what is important to themselves.

Two-thirds of the way through my observations, I selected a handful of focal students in each class to narrow my focus and have more in-depth observations. I selected four students from each class and tried to get a mix of race, gender and achievement
levels. Of these four students I chose two girls, one White and one Black and two boys, one White and one Black. One reason for this was because of the variability of the classroom: each class was closely evenly divided between Black and White. Another reason for the deliberate diversity was to ensure a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. With this aim in mind I also looked for students who were on a range of achievement levels. In each class I selected a student who was reading at a higher level than second grade, a student who was reading at a low enough level to qualify for tutoring, and two students who were in between.

_Brittany_

Brittany was a White girl in Donna’s class who loved to read and at the time of the mid-year assessments was reading at level P, which is expected at the end of third grade⁴. Donna taught both Brittany and her older sister a few years before. Brittany’s parents had her older sister when they were around 18; her father worked in what Donna described as a “blue collar job” and her mother stayed at home. Donna described Brittany’s parents as “totally focused on their children...on them being good students and people.” From an early age, Brittany had been encouraged to read books. She enjoyed family trips to the library and getting books as presents.

Brittany enjoyed her status as one of the highest achieving students in Donna’s class. When she was finished with her work, she would read her free time chapter book, help her classmates, or socialize with friends. In addition to having the freedom to choose her activities, Brittany also enjoyed knowing she had done well. At times, this was a hindrance to her, because

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⁴ All reading levels were based on the Fountas and Pinnell Guided Reading levels.
when she was confused she became very frustrated over not knowing the answer. She worried sometimes about making a mistake and one day ended up in tears over having to change her discipline card. In the whole time I observed, I never saw Brittany have to change her card over a discipline problem; this occasion was simply because she had to use the restroom\(^5\). The fact that she wasn’t actually “in trouble” didn’t matter to Brittany; she was upset and embarrassed because of the appearance of misbehavior. I noticed some of this anxiety during our first interview. Although I had been in the class for months and had talked with her almost every day I was there, her voice shook and she was unsure of what answers to give.

*Cory*

Cory was a Black boy in Donna’s class whose passion in life is cars; he enjoyed reading about fancy cars and helping his father, who was a mechanic, work in their cars. Diagnosed with ADHD, Cory struggled with focusing on self-control. Without his medicine, he became loud, angry and frustrated with himself and others. Joe and Cory spent most of the time alternating sitting in the back desk, because both of them, for different reasons, struggled to focus on their work when there were others around. I was afraid at times that my proximity to him was a hindrance to him, because of his talkative nature.

\(^5\) Donna’s class rule was that if a student had to use the restroom, they had one “free” time and after that had to change their discipline card to the next level. Levels were green, yellow, blue and red. Every child began the day on green. Yellow meant a warning, blue meant a fierce warning and sometimes missing or having delayed recess, and red meant a note home. These cards were used in Susan’s class also, but not to as great an extent as Donna’s.
Cory’s mother was an aide at school, and although his mother was out on maternity leave at the beginning of the year, there were quite a few staff members who knew him well enough that they would check on him and support him. Although he was reading at level M, which is the end of second grade, Cory did not always achieve as high as he and Donna thought he could. He struggled with self-doubt and insecurity because of his hyperactivity and occasional alterations to his medication. During those times, he preferred to sit near his friend Zack, who was a calming influence on him. Sometimes he noticed he was struggling to maintain control and requested to sit by himself, in the back, at which point Joe would be moved to sit at a table with his classmates.

When he wasn’t reading his cars books, he enjoyed spending his free time with his writing folder stories, which he frequently read to me. They typically were action-themed stories, sometimes variations on stories that had been read in class and always featured his school friends. Of all the students I observed, Cory seemed the most focused on his skin color and differences in skin color. A few times he shared with me about a cousin who was lighter skinned than he, “but he’s still black, although he looks white.” Cory also enjoyed sharing with me about the rest of his family, telling me about helping his father fix cars, visiting his grandmother over the weekend, or seeing his uncle in prison. I often had to remind him to work while he talked because he would get so interested in talking to me he would forget to work.

Joe

Joe was a White boy in Donna’s class who was reading at level O, which is mid-third grade, by the middle of the year assessments. He enjoyed reading, but his favorite activity is working on his Star Wars-themed stories in his writer’s workshop folder. Joe’s
mother volunteered for the PTA and was often around the school building and classroom. Joe’s mother was frequently in the hallways or coming into the classroom to deliver messages to Donna and took him and a friend of his choice out to lunch once a week.

Joe’s mom often brought in texts from home relating to whatever topics Donna was teaching at the time. He and his brother were encouraged to use texts and home and he frequently told Donna how his parents encouraged him to use the Internet or an encyclopedia to look up something he didn’t know. On occasion, Joe would comment to me about a book he was reading and how it was similar to one his mother had for him at home.

Joe’s brother was autistic and his mother had expressed to Donna concerns that Joe would start showing signs as well. Early in the year, Donna didn’t notice anything, but as the months progressed, she began to see signs relating to the autism spectrum. Having a brother who has Asperger’s Syndrome, I began to notice certain behaviors that were similar to Asperger’s early in October. Joe struggled sometimes to not become overloaded when around a lot of social activity and requested to sit in the back desk usually reserved for discipline problems. Difficulty with abstract concepts, seeing only one path to completing a task and being highly focused on a particular topic were all symptoms of Asperger’s Syndrome which Joe exhibited. After talking with me about it, Joe’s mother decided to have him tested, the outcome of which was not clear when my observations ended.

When Joe sat in the back seat, he would frequently engage me in conversation, sharing with me about his work and how well it was going or his frustrations with it. His favorite topic of conversation was his writer’s folder stories, which were always
variations of *Star Wars*. When he became frustrated with his work, I would try to talk him through the frustration and help him not become too stuck.

*Keisha*

Keisha was a Black girl in Donna’s class who arrived at the beginning of October. Keisha lives with her mother, who frequently helped her with her homework but did not often speak to Donna about Keisha’s struggles. Keisha often came in late, which was an even greater detriment to her than others, because she was so far behind and so did not always have time to complete her work. When Keisha first arrived at Clayton Elementary, her reading level was a B, which is a mid-kindergarten level. Although she always tried hard to pay attention, Keisha frequently asked for my or Donna’s help with almost every question at the beginning of the year. She often struggled to decode very short words and understand the text of what was being read to her. Gradually, with support in the class and in tutoring, she became more independent but Donna worried that she would never get the help she needed.

Donna initially believed Keisha lacked the needed vocabulary to succeed, but after seeing how little she was progressing began to wonder if she had a learning disorder. Although Donna wanted her to be evaluated, she worried that because of the evaluation guidelines, she might not get the help she needed. Donna was afraid Keisha would test close enough to her age guidelines that the evaluators would decide to wait a year or two, at which point she would struggle even more. “It’s still such a struggle it’s almost painful, ‘cause she wants it so hard and she’s so far behind.”

Interviews with Keisha were difficult sometimes because she was very shy and unsure of herself, speaking so quietly I could not always make out what she was saying.
In my observation, however, I noticed her asserting herself more, particularly at times when she had the support of a classmate to help her with the schoolwork. Keisha knew she was not always able to do the work the way her classmates could, but was never shy about asking for help. At times, it seemed as though she wanted me to do the work for her, but she never refused to try and was always willing to make an effort.

**Deirdre**

Deirdre was a Black girl in Susan’s class who was being raised mostly by her grandmother because her mother, who struggled with drug and alcohol abuse, is in and out of her life. Deirdre’s grandmother worked full time, but always made a point to go to conferences and tried to keep her granddaughter “on the right path,” as Susan described it. Both Susan and her grandmother worried about her because she likes to please people and they were afraid she may try to please people who are not good influences on her. Already, Susan can see Deirdre being drawn to following students who frequently get in trouble.

Deirdre was a social, talkative girl who enjoyed sharing texts with her friends, and sometimes lost focus on her assigned task because she was talking to or writing with a classmate. Whenever possible, she would work with classmates. At the beginning of the year, Deirdre went to daily tutoring, but when Keisha, in Donna’s class, came, she was moved out to make room for Keisha, who was farther behind. Deirdre was pleased she no longer needed it, but Susan worried that she still needed the extra help. At the mid-year assessments, she was reading at level K, which is early second grade.
Derek

Derek was a Black boy in Susan’s class who was a bit of an enigma for Susan. He was often quiet in class, particularly in first grade, but recently had been having what Susan called “tantrums”—outbursts of anger and disobedience. She wasn’t sure why he was doing this and was trying to understand it. His achievement was generally average to lower than average, and Susan was always unsure what he understood because he rarely asked questions. Susan remembered being a quiet child and feeling lost all the time because her teachers rarely checked on her, so she tried to make a point of calling on Derek and others who were quiet, but she still struggled to know whether he understood in whole-class events. After the middle of the year assessments, Derek was reading at level J, which is early second grade, and he was sent to tutoring for 45 minutes a day.

In my observations, it seemed Derek struggled with confidence. If the topic was something he was interested in, he was an active participant, but if he got a question wrong, he would often not raise his hand again. Derek said his parents would help him with his work and he enjoyed poetry at home. He told me he was a good reader and writer because he practiced all the time and reading and writing helped make him smarter.

Lucy

Lucy was a White girl in Susan’s class who lived with her mother and father, with a few grown siblings. Because she was so much younger than her siblings, her family tended to baby her. Lucy was something of an enigma for Susan, who wondered if her odd behavior was due to her family’s treatment of her or something deeper. She was often teary over minor occurrences, talked to herself frequently and struggled with tasks
such as learning to tie her shoe. At the beginning of the year, Lucy was reading at level P, which is upper third grade. The first half of the year, Lucy’s mother asked Susan a few times how Lucy was progressing, but because of the testing rules, Susan was unable to assess her until the mid-year assessments, so she was unable to find out. By the mid-year assessments, Lucy was reading at level S, which is expected for the end of fourth grade.

Like Joe in Donna’s class, Lucy exhibited symptoms that relate to the autism spectrum or another learning disorder. Susan described her as “very bright, but she’s lost in her own world, like all the time.” Typically one of the quieter students, Lucy preferred to draw in her notebook or reading to any other activity and often had to be told to put her drawing away and pay attention.

Susan worried about Lucy because she seemed unable to perform tasks that were expected of second-graders, such as tying her shoes. One day, Lucy struggled for several minutes to figure out how to put her shoe on because she didn’t realize she needed to loosen the laces. When Susan showed her how, Lucy was very appreciative but because she wasn’t made to practice at home, she never picked up on it. In first grade, Susan spoke with Lucy’s kindergarten teacher, who said “what are we going to do as a public school system…she’s functioning. It’s maybe just a sign of her being intelligent.” Susan told me all she could do was recommend an Intervention Assistance Team, which would consist of a counselor, teacher, other specialists and the parent. These teams are organized for both discipline and academic problems, but Susan doesn’t believe much would happen. In March, Lucy met with the counselor one day and became upset when she found it wouldn’t be a weekly meeting.
Most of the time, Lucy was a very quiet child who did her work with little fuss. She would sometimes get upset if things didn’t happen the way she expected them to, or if classmates teased her. Although it didn’t happen often, she rarely asserted herself over anything, and Susan frequently became frustrated with what she considered were overreactions to little problems.

Matthew

Matthew was a White boy in Susan’s class who lived with his mother but spent most of his time with his grandparents while his mother worked and went to school. I was unable to learn much about Matthew’s home life, as he was reluctant to share, stating only “you don’t want to know what it’s like at my house.” When I asked him to explain at a later date, he was reluctant to talk about it. Diagnosed with ADHD, he, like Cory, struggled at times to focus his attention and maintain control of his anger. Susan believes his mother felt bad that he had to take medication, so it took some time for him to begin taking it regularly. Once that happened, he was mostly a very happy and friendly child. Because of his focus issues, he spent most of the months I was there seated very close to me, sometimes with his desk facing away from everyone and others facing forward.

Due to this proximity, Matthew frequently engaged me in conversation, sharing with me about his work. He began the year reading at a first-grade level, much lower than most of his peers and went to tutoring for 45 minutes a day, but by the mid-year assessments, Matthew was reading a level M, which was where students were expected to be at the end of second grade, so he no longer qualified for tutoring. Susan attributed this to his hard work\(^6\), and indeed, he was very excited about no longer having to go to

\(^6\) The phrase “hard work” was used a lot and was often defined as doing what one was told and completing assignments accurately and in the appropriate amount of time.
tutoring, which he greatly disliked. Susan was surprised and worried that although he was reading at a higher level, he would still need the tutoring support for vocabulary and comprehension help.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Reading level by January</th>
<th>Additional notes</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Brittany</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>End of third grade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cory</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>End of second grade</td>
<td>ADHD, prevented him from being more successful</td>
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<td>Joe</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>Middle of third grade</td>
<td>Suspected of having Asperger’s syndrome</td>
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<td>Keisha</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Middle of kindergarten</td>
<td>Donna suspected her of having a learning disorder, but feared she would not get the help she needed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Susan’s Class</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deirdre</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Early second grade</td>
<td>Started in tutoring, moved out so Keisha could go in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derek</td>
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<td>Black</td>
<td>Early second grade</td>
<td>Started near the middle, entered tutoring in January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>White</td>
<td>Upper third grade</td>
<td>Suspected of having Asperger’s syndrome</td>
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<td>Matthew</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>End of second grade</td>
<td>Started low, moved to end of second grade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Demographics of the eight focal students
Summary of the eight focal students

The classroom demographics were highly complex and made choosing focal students a delicate and time-consuming effort. As I stated previously, I wanted to represent the gender and racial representations of the classrooms, so for the four focal students in each class, I wanted two White students and two Black; two girls and two boys. I also wanted to represent varying achievement levels. Socioeconomic diversity was a bit difficult to capture at times, and I relied mostly on the teachers’ descriptions, as they knew their students better. Socioeconomic status was not one of my categories, however, as most students’ families would be considered working class or lower middle class and there was not much disparity.

Some of the focal student selection was easy, as only one of my observed students in each class fit the categories I had selected. On glancing at the chart on the previous page, there seems to be a racial disparity, as most of the White students were higher achieving and most of the Black students were middle or lower achieving. Part of this is because it represents an actual disparity in the classrooms: most of the Black boys in Donna’s class were lower achieving (Cory being the exception, when his medication enabled him to focus), although there were a couple of higher achieving Black girls. Instead of choosing them, I chose Keisha, in part because she was the only one who went to tutoring but also because I wanted to know more about her experiences as such a low achiever. In Susan’s class, there was less racial disparity, but I was not given permission to observe the lower achieving White girls or higher achieving Black boys. Other
students were chosen because I had developed a particular rapport with them, like Joe, or because I wanted to know more about them, like Derek.

Procedures

Data Collection

Researching literacy from an ethnographic perspective requires more than just choosing methods from a list. The methods used are related to one’s theory and purpose (Green, et al., 2003; Lillis, 2008). When the goal is to understand a culture or community, the methods needed to be geared toward understanding the participants’ perspective, and in this case, how literacy was embedded in these classrooms. Just as with theoretical perspective and chosen questions, data collection from an ethnographic perspective reflects a way of seeing the world (Green, et al., 2003; Lillis, 2008). As an ethnographer, I was taking the position of a learner in the classrooms, and it was important for data to come from a range of perspectives, but observation was a key tool for understanding (Lillis, 2008). Data collection methods included participant observation; interviewing teachers and focal students; and collecting and analyzing classroom documents, including curricular materials.

Participant Observation

Participant observation was my primary method of data collection. Because literacy research from the ethnographic perspective is focused around understanding how people in schools use literacy from their perspectives, it was important for me to observe the lives of participants and how they make meaning (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Heath & Street, 2006; Hubbard, 1988; 1989; Spradley, 1980). Observing and being in the community being researched “evokes a participatory presence, a sensitive contact with
the world to be understood, a rapport with its people a concreteness of perception” (Clifford, 1988: 37). After I had been observing in the classrooms for some time, I was treated as a fixture in the classes, with my regular spot and part of the routines. Although my active participation in instructional times ranged along a spectrum, I was an acknowledged participant in the classes.

Observations began the third week of September and continued until the third week of March. Donna and Susan both taught the literacy block in the mornings, so I alternated between the classes. Week one, I observed Donna’s class Monday and Wednesday and Susan’s class Tuesday and Thursday. The following week I observed Susan’s class Monday and Wednesday and Donna’s class Tuesday and Thursday. For the most part, I continued this pattern each week. A few times I altered it because of planned absences by the teachers and in the middle of my observations I observed Donna’s class for a whole week and Susan’s for another whole week, due to the nature of my questions at that time (see Appendix B for sample schedule). The purpose for the alternations was so I could get a thorough understanding of what happened each day in the two classes. Fridays were reserved for transcription and analysis, so I was able to maintain a recursive cycle of research and analysis. Literacy events on Fridays typically included spelling tests, review of the week, finishing projects and sometimes center work. I was still able to observe these events because they occasionally occurred on other days, due to scheduling shifts, teacher absences or school programs. Although they took place most often on Fridays, center work and project completion, in particular, occurred at various days throughout the year, so I was still able to gather an understanding of those events.
I observed both classes during the morning literacy blocks. Students began arriving at school around 8:45 and did morning work until 9:15 or 9:30, when the teachers would begin literacy block instruction. The length of Susan’s literacy block varied, sometimes ending a little after 11 and sometimes running until noon, when the students went to recess. Donna’s literacy block was more predictable and lasted until recess began at noon. Sometimes observations were interrupted by art, music, library, and school events. Over the course of five months, I observed over 180 hours during 77 total days, spending 38 days in Donna’s class and 39 in Susan’s.

Although I wanted to include video or audio recordings as part of my observational data collection, due to district restraints, I was unable to. Instead, I handwrote my observations in notebooks and later transcribed them into the analysis program Ethnograph. Because I handwrote rather than recording, I knew I was not going to be able to record everything that happened in the classroom or everything that was said, so I was forced to edit and narrow my focus from the start, which turned out to be highly beneficial and easier to manage. My initial observations involved a holistic look at classroom literacy events, with a focus on who was involved in events and what themes were present. I then narrowed my focus to the teachers, who were responsible for structuring literacy events. I examined their expressed values, curricular decisions, and how they addressed student values. This final focus enabled me to further narrow my focus one last time, to the students, who often felt and were treated as recipients of literacy practices, rather than participants in their creation.

7 See Appendix A for a detailed description of the schedule of questions and observation focus.
Role of the Researcher

To simply say I was using participant-observation as a data collection method does not provide a full description of my role in the classrooms. Participant-observation is a wide spectrum, ranging from sole observation in the background to full, active participant (Purcell-Gates, 2004). Smith’s research was primarily observational in the classroom, not deliberately interacting with students through the course of the day, but she did interact with them informally outside of class and was even sometimes given the role of a peer (i.e. on occasion she was asked to ferry a note from one student to another). Other times, however, she took the role of an authority figure as a chaperone or whatever the teachers needed. Her in-class research involved passive observation, but she moved when students moved and sat when they sat, even going so far as to don goggles when they did (Smith, 2001). In contrast, for her second year, Bruna was in a teacher-researcher role and therefore a highly active participant in the classroom and school (Bruna, 2007).

My roles varied between Donna’s and Susan’s classrooms. I began initially as a passive observer, sitting in the background and writing what I saw in my notebook. When the class moved as a group, I moved for a better view, but remained far in the back. When students near me engaged me in conversation, I responded in kind, but tried to be careful not to distract them from their work. On occasion, students, particularly Matthew in Susan’s class and Cory in Donna’s class, would be admonished by their teachers to stop talking to me and do their work, so I sometimes tried to remind them to work before they were scolded.
A few weeks into my research, I walked into Donna’s class one day to be greeted by a substitute. I explained why I was there and that, since she was there, I would not be observing that day and prepared to leave. Because she had never been in Donna’s class before and the students were working on a confusing assignment, she asked me to stay a short time and help her out. I walked around helping students, and after that day, they understood that I was available for help and answering questions, and I became something of an aide. Donna appreciated the extra help and during the daily independent work, I walked around, observing, answering questions and helping where needed. Donna would even leave the room sometimes, knowing I would manage the class. During these times, it became clear that I was in a kind of middle space between teacher and friend to the students. As an adult, second graders would not see me as an equal and recognized me as having some authority, but they also recognized that I wasn’t a replacement for Donna and was not the ultimate authority in their classroom. They knew they could ask me questions and engage me in conversation.

Having such a participatory role in Donna’s class meant I needed to balance what I did with what I observed. At times I had to step away from my participant role so I could observe and take notes on classroom events, sometimes literally. This was a struggle because several students had come to rely on me for help, and I had to ask them to wait sometimes for me to finish what I was writing. Doing this was serendipitous because it increased interest in what I was writing, and when it came time to choose focal students, they were more aware of why I was there.

While my role in Donna’s class was strongly participatory, my role in Susan’s class was on the passive observation side of the spectrum. Although early on Susan and I
discussed the possibility of me taking a more participatory role, particularly to help students and maintain control of the larger group during small group events, this rarely happened. I struggled to understand why there was such a difference between the classes. It seemed to be in part because of how the classes were structured. Susan’s class was mostly whole group or everyone doing the same individual assignments, whereas Donna’s class involved students doing multiple assignments in a large block of time.

On occasion I would walk around the room, helping students, but conversation was limited both between students and one another and between students and me at those times. Due to the nature of the classroom setup, my seat was in the back but next to students, so one-on-one interactions were common. Like Donna’s room, I rarely initiated interactions to prevent students from being admonished to work, but students enjoyed coming up to me to say hello, give me a hug or show me their work.

As primarily an observer in Susan’s class, I did not struggle as I did in Donna’s class with being able to balance the participant and observer roles. Instead, I was mostly observer, but because my seat was with the students, I was still able to gain an understanding of the students’ perspectives, sitting among the students, observing their casual conversations and behaviors.

A few times in both classes I volunteered to share resources with the teachers and students. In November, both Susan and Donna included Thanksgiving-themed activities in reading and social studies, including lessons about American Indians and Pilgrims. Because I had visited Plymouth Plantation, I shared my pictures with the students. When the classes studied money in math class, I shared my collection of foreign currency. One day in February, Susan informed me she had lost her voice and asked me to read a book
to her class so she could rest her voice for a bit. In each of these instances, the teachers afforded me control over the event, letting me ask students questions and handle the class.

*Interviews*

Interviews are especially important in understanding meaning making from the participants’ perspective because they provided me with first-hand descriptions of what it means to be a member of that community (Purcell-Gates, 2004; Spradley, 1980). Information provided in interviews can help guide research questions and observation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Researchers can ask focused questions to better understand what was observed (Hubbard, 1988; Purcell-Gates, 2004). Hubbard asked her informants to help define “folk terms” and what these terms meant to students.

I interviewed both Susan and Donna a few weeks after I started my observations. My initial questions were focused on getting to know the teachers and understanding their theoretical perspectives (See Appendix C for the initial teacher interview questions). I wanted to know how the teachers defined literacy and their rationales for how they structured their classrooms and instruction. For the most part, I followed the questions I had preset, but I also asked follow-up questions of each teacher in response to things they had said or made casual conversational comments instead of just asking questions. These interviews gave me a deeper understanding of the teachers and the classroom practices.

Midway through my observations, in January, I interviewed the teachers again (see Appendix D), asking questions about the teachers’ backgrounds, but mostly focusing on the students. I was shifting my observational focus to the focal students, so most of my questions in the second interviews were about the students in general and the 8 focal
students I had selected. One purpose for this was to confirm my observations about the students and gain the teachers’ approval that these students would give me the range I was looking for.

After I interviewed Susan and Donna the second time, I interviewed the 8 focal students I had selected. These first interviews were somewhat difficult, as some students were nervous and I interviewed them in the classrooms, where there was a lot of noise and activity. Whereas teacher interviews ranged from 22 minutes to 80 (this disparity was due to how much the teachers had to say) and averaged 48 minutes, student interviews ranged from 5 to 10.

The purpose of the student interviews was for me to gain their insights into the classroom practices and compare them to teachers’ perceptions. Smith’s (2008) interviews with teachers and focal students revealed the teachers believed their classrooms to be highly democratic, but the students felt their teachers were strongly in control and did not believe they had many choices in classroom proceedings. Similarly, I asked students questions to understand what they believed was important in the classroom and how they perceived the classroom structure. In contrast to Smith’s study, which involved high school students, however, asking questions of second-graders was somewhat difficult at times, because they were not always as comfortable being interviewed or not always able to articulate their perspectives. These interviews still proved to be both useful and insightful.

Interviews can be used to refine and confirm developing theories. Smith’s interviews with students confirmed her observations of the teachers’ beliefs regarding the nature of the identity of an honors student and the students’ resistance to their beliefs
Her observations with the teachers identified competing views about what it meant to be an honors student, because some of the students and teachers described the qualities of an honors student as being innate, whereas other teachers explained that an honors student is distinguished through effort. These interviews demonstrated to her that there were strongly competing beliefs regarding the identity of an honors student. My interview questions were designed to confirm and expand my theories concerning what I had observed in the classrooms (see Appendices E and F for initial and final student interview questions).

At the end of my observations, I interviewed the focal students again. My original intent was to interview the teachers a third time, but because I had had numerous casual conversations with them through the course of the year, I felt it was unnecessary. We addressed any unanswered questions during these conversations during and after class.

*Document collection*

In addition to observing and interviewing participants, I collected curriculum documents and artifacts created in the classroom. I also photographed the classroom setups and large artifacts. Because reading and writing are situated within the social constructs of the classroom, it is useful to have this visual data to analyze (Anderson-Levitt, 2006). Photographs are useful to capture not just the text itself but also its situatedness within a physical space (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Bruna, 2007). Through this, she was able to identify students’ use of “tagging” on public objects, such as a wall or school chair. Without these photographs, she might never have noticed how stylized and contextual these pieces of print were. It was not just the words used but where and how they were written that gave it significance. Although I was unable to take photographs of
students, I photographed how the classroom was set up, where student-created texts were displayed and how the teachers used text around the classroom.

Literacy, at its core, centered around the use of text, so it is vital to understand what kinds of texts are used and how they are used (Heath & Street, 2006). Hubbard and Grote collected their informants’ writing samples, analyzing their messages, syntax, and place in the situation (Hubbard, 1988; 1989; Grote, 2006). Part of my focus was on what cultural values were represented in the curriculum and some of those values come from outside forces. The school literacy curriculum was chosen and mandated by the school district, so it was important to understand what values were represented in this curriculum.

Every teacher at Clayton Elementary used Harcourt’s Story Town language arts program, which is described as “a research-based developmental reading and language arts program” which uses a direct, systematic instruction (Professional Development Handbook, 2008: 2). Divided into 6 five-week themes, each week included spelling, vocabulary, writing, reading, fluency, high frequency words and comprehension. Most prescribed activities were designed to be for the whole class, but small reading groups, structured around ability were also included. Lessons followed a typical pattern and were highly directive, with texts for what teachers should say and what students’ responses should be.

I collected curriculum samples in two phases, the first of which was before my observations. I borrowed Donna’s teacher manual for theme 1 and made two copies of the whole text. I retained one copy for a master copy and the second so I could make notes in my analysis. Selecting a whole theme gave me a good sample of the classroom
curriculum. As I observed, I took careful note of curricular events that were either in line or contradictory to what I was learning. Several months into my observations I again borrowed Donna and Susan’s teachers’ manuals, this time for themes two through five (theme six was begun after my observations finished) and copied the lessons I had already taken note of. This second phase of document collection was more focused than the first. While the first was intended to give me an overall sample and understanding of the curriculum, the second phase was intended to support and clarify my analysis and developing theories.

Documents created in the classroom were particularly useful in understanding classroom literacy practices because they were significant aspects of literacy events (Grote, 2006; Smith, 2008). My collection process was based on observations and developing theories. While most of the time, I observed Donna and Susan’s classrooms on alternating days, in the middle of my observations, I spent one week in only Donna’s class and one week in only Susan’s, in order to gain a better understanding of the flow and how literacy events from one day were connected to another. On these weeks, I collected samples of the texts assigned in each classroom. When it became clear that both classes used a regular pattern of texts, I collected samples of focal students’ work. The final phase of my observation was focused on the focal students, so during those weeks I collected texts the students had created, particularly stories and drawings. The purpose for this was to better understand what the students did they were given more freedom to create texts, rather than filling in worksheets.
Data collection as a recursive process

It is impossible to observe and record everything that occurs in a classroom. A major part of participant observation requires choosing who or what to focus on (Smith, 2001). Researchers need to overcome what Spradley calls “selective inattention,” instead making our awareness explicit (Spradley, 1980). I knew I couldn’t go into the classrooms expecting to observe everything; instead, I had to be clear on what I was observing and from what perspective. The question of what literacy practices are present in two second-grade classrooms is fairly broad, so in order to get to the heart of the issue and best manage my observations, I divided my time up into four distinct phases, with several small questions in each. These phases and questions were progressive, one building on the other. These questions were not only designed to be progressive, but to also narrow my focus.

Phase one: In the first phase, I analyzed the first unit of the curriculum, including lesson plans, sample worksheets and content structure. The purpose of this phase was twofold. First, I wanted to develop an awareness of common classroom structures before entering the classrooms. Although I knew neither class would strictly follow the curriculum structure, it was an initial guide and afforded me a significant amount of familiarity when I entered each classroom for the first time. I continued to collect classroom and curriculum documents throughout each phase.

Phase two: Although this was the second phase, it was the first phase of observations, in which I spent two mornings a week in each classroom observing the 2- to 3-hour literacy blocks. This second phase was centered on understanding major themes in
the instructional time, and what participants were and were not involved in literacy events. It was in this phase I conducted initial teacher interviews.

*Phase three:* This phase of observation was focused on understanding teachers’ values and beliefs regarding literacy and how they used texts in their classrooms. Near the end of this phase was when I conducted the second teacher interviews and the first student interviews.

*Phase four:* I focused the final phase of observation on understanding literacy practices from the students’ perspectives. At the end of this phase, I conducted final student interviews.

Although this was the schedule I followed and I stuck fairly closely to the questions, this was a reflexive and recursive process. Recursive research demands that questions be revised, refined and created in situ (Green, et al., 2003). Changes must be made based on what the ethnographer learns and these changes in data collection and theory must be part of the methodology. These changes were grounded in my developing understanding of what it meant to be a member of these classrooms. My changes occurred in the form of altering the schedule depending on whether I felt I needed more or less observation with a particular question. As practices were emerging in my analysis, I focused my observations more on these emerging practices and theories.

A key to this recursive process is being able to identify when to complete my data collection and when I had learned as much as possible from this site. This has often been referred to as reaching a point of saturation (Bowen, 2008). Rooted in grounded theory, saturation occurs when the researcher reaches a point when no new theories or insights arise from data collection and analysis. As I observed and analyzed, following the
schedule I had set, I began noticing that I was observing similar events each day, not seeing any differences in student or teacher behaviors and that my analysis was not providing new codes or theories. At that point, I realized I had gleaned all I could from these two classrooms. Keeping this schedule and point of saturation helped maintain the reliability of my research (Purcell-Gates, 2004).

Analysis

The process of analysis began almost as soon as data collection began. I began data collection with a question in mind, but data collection, question formation and data analysis overlapped in a recursive process (Purcell-Gates, 2004). Once data collection began, I began analyzing and looking for patterns, trying to discover the cultural meaning behind what I had observed (Hubbard, 1989; Masny & Ghahremani-Ghajar, 1999; Spradley, 1980). It was not enough to be merely descriptive about what I saw. Research from an ethnographic perspective is geared toward understanding the cultural meaning guiding what is observed, so I had to dig deeper to understand the significance of the patterns I was recognizing (Erickson, 1986; Purcell-Gates, 2004). As Erickson (1986) notes, ethnographers are “attempting to identify the significance of actions in the events from the various points of view of the actors themselves” (121). Analysis is about making sense of what is described and trying to understand the socially shared meanings, searching for patterns and relationships (Erickson, 1986; Spradley, 1980). When Hubbard began analyzing her data, she was looking for semantic patterns: phrases that had meaning in her informants’ lives (Hubbard, 1988). As she learned these patterns, she refined her questions to focus more on how these patterns are guided by the relationships the students had with one another and with authority figures.
As I began analyzing, I frequently reviewed my notes and coding for the next day’s observations. As I observed, I kept a mental list of emerging codes, and paid careful attention to look for additional confirming and disconfirming occasions that expanded my understanding.

*The use of theory in analysis*

Theory was an important part of my research, but I needed to make sure I used it wisely. My theories regarding literacy guided the entire process, helping me formulate questions, focus observations, and make sense of the data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Purcell-Gates, 2004). Schools are incredibly complex social situations, with a great deal happening at the same time, and it is important that researchers bring some theoretical awareness to the analysis (Erickson, 1986; 2004; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Purcell-Gates, 2004). Researchers need to use theoretical frameworks to help them identify significant issues. The goal was not to manipulate data to fit a pre-existing theory, however, but rather to have an awareness of theories that might help understand the data (Erickson, 2004; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). This was especially important when studying literacy practices because the use of reading and writing in a community are driven by multiple ways of being and knowing. I drew heavily on New Literacy Studies and hidden curriculum theory to help me make sense of what was going on (Erickson, 2004).

*The literacy event as a unit of analysis*

Analysis of my research involved identifying literacy events and common patterns and themes within these events. A significant aspect of a New Literacy Studies theoretical framework is the concept that the use of text and social interaction are
intertwined in identifiable literacy events. My use of the literacy event as a unit of analysis was based on the notion that literacy and the social world it is in are co-constructed through interpersonal interaction (Bruna, 2007; Lillis, 2008; Purcell-Gates, 2004). As people create and use texts, they are drawing on cultural rules for the texts. The texts do not exist by themselves, but rather are part of the situation (Heath & Street, 2006). For example, Smith’s identification of literacy events in the first two days of the honors classroom revealed not only patterns of text use but also underlying themes and beliefs (Smith, 2008). In each event, the texts were used in specific ways and had specific meanings to them, which were not always evident to the participants. The choosing of group names and mission statement compositions were designed to give the students a voice in the class proceedings. In the end, however, the handouts and the parameters for the mission statement demonstrated to the students that the teachers had ultimate authority. Even the writing of the names on the board showed the students who was in charge, because the teachers were the ones who wrote the names and they provided opinions on the names. Each of these events demonstrated that although the students had some autonomy, the teachers were rationing it.

My initial observations and analysis were centered on identifying common literacy events in both classrooms, which are described in Chapter Four. These events were often clearly identifiable, as Donna and Susan would indicate to their students when it was time to change activities, and a change of location often occurred as well.
Data analysis

Document analysis

When using literacy events as a unit of analysis, I was not looking at the texts as removed, independent pieces, but rather as reliant on the situation in which they were used. Smith (2001; 2008) did not just look at a syllabus for a class, but she considered the way in which the handout was used and what it meant to the students and the teachers. It was also important to consider the many different meanings texts can have. Classroom communities are complex creations and the texts within are no different. When Smith’s teachers wrote the students’ suggestions for group names on the board, this event had different meanings for different groups. For the teachers, it was an occasion for the students to express themselves and begin to develop their “honor student” personae. Much to the teachers’ consternation, however, for many of the students it was an occasion to rebel against that persona. Many of the students in Hubbard’s (1989) study kept various texts taped to their desks, including in one case an empty M&Ms box. Each of these pieces held meaning to the students and their peers.

My initial analysis of the curriculum was as removed pieces, in that at the time, I was not observing actual classroom literacy events, but I still used the concept of literacy events to examine the texts. In this study, I did not try to understand whether or not instructional methods were effective in teaching children to read and write; rather, in seeking to understand what distinct practices were being created in these two classrooms, I considered what role these curricular texts played, with all the background and baggage they brought with them.
Because I was examining the curriculum in order to understand what values were present in the district-imposed curriculum, I approached it from the perspective that these were prescribed literacy events. They weren’t actual events, but were being described as potential literacy events. These events described what students and teachers were expected to do and say. Intended learning content and texts to be used were also clearly specified. In doing this, I wanted to understand what the expected literacy events were, from the perspective of the outside influences.

Following my initial identification of literacy events, I made a list of all literacy events, how they were structured and on what days of the week they were to occur. For ease of organization and clarity, I used the titles and headings used in the curriculum. Within some of the events, such as vocabulary, grammar or comprehension, were mini-events, based on a guided reading practice. These events tended to include a combination of Teach and Model, Practice and Apply, Review, and Reinforce the content or skill of the event.

When I began analyzing the first curriculum theme, I photocopied the whole book and separated the pages by prescribed literacy events. Following that, I read through each event, underlining references to values and beliefs, such as “the right thing to do” or discussions of good versus bad behaviors. As I went through these events, I focused on what both teachers and students were expected to do and say. I paid particular attention to the texts students were to read and the scripted texts teachers were to say. Following that, I went back through and looked for references to different cultures and ethnicities or what was treated as normal. As I looked through, I also began to notice other common themes, such as how scripted and directive the texts were in relation to teacher actions.
These also entered my notes. After this analysis, I looked at each literacy event separately and listed the general themes and my initial impressions. Some of these related to the structure of events, such as “whole group work” or “student contribution,” whereas others related to underlying themes, such as “character qualities” or “definition of reading.” I also included in these notes the different text formats, including charts and word webs.

Figure 1: Sample literacy event from the curriculum

After I had made these notes, I went through and recorded the codes I had written (see Appendix G for the initial code list). After creating a code list, I went back through and wrote notes about the codes, using descriptions from the text to clarify and expand the list. These emerging themes and literacy event descriptions were used to inform my observations when I began my phase 2 data collection in the classrooms.

My second pass at the curriculum and classroom documents was based on all my analysis up to that point. I selected samples of lessons, worksheets and stories that both confirmed and disconfirmed the theories and patterns I had seen.
*Analysis of observations*

When using literacy events as the unit of analysis a key step was to identify specific behaviors surrounding reading and writing (Bruna, 2007). Bruna asked *when do they happen* and *who is involved*. In one literacy event, students were supposed to be conducting dissections, but a few students instead began “tagging” on the board—writing the names of their home regions. At first glance, it looks as if this was an isolated event involving a few students within a larger event (the class period), but asking a few more questions provides a different story.

My initial observations were centered on understanding what literacy events commonly occurred in each room, on each day and what participants were involved in the events. My first few days involved taking notes on the teachers’ words and actions, and when students began to return signed permission forms, I observed their words and actions as well. I began by trying to take notes on every action, text and spoken word possible (Anderson-Levitt, 2006). Following each day’s observation, I typed my notes into the qualitative data analysis software Ethnograph, version 6. After the first week, I began coding my observations, starting with classroom identified literacy events.

Naturally, this universal observation method is not conducive for in-depth focus, but it helped me at the beginning because: a) I did not know what to look for initially, so I was able to get a more panoramic view; and b) my theoretical perspective naturally drew my attention to points of interest.

Once literacy events were identified, I began work on the process of looking for patterns by repeatedly searching the growing corpus of data (Bowen, 2008; Erickson, 1986; 2004). I started by looking for consistencies, such as when Hubbard (1988) looked
for times when certain phrases were used versus times when they weren’t, or when Bruna (2007) examined students’ behaviors surrounding their “tagging” events. The goal was to “identify stable features that transcend immediate contexts” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007: 163). As I did this, I read through my notes, looking for how students behaved during events and how they interacted with one another, the texts and the teachers. My goal was to understand common behaviors and ways students and teachers interacted with one another and with texts. As I began to identify patterns, I attached codes to them and looked for more occurrences of these patterns, frequently going back to previously coded segments as I added new codes (Bowen, 2008)⁸.

As the weeks went on, I followed the data collection schedule but drew my focus toward frequently occurring codes. At the end of each phase, I pulled the segments for each code and read through them to get a full understanding of the meaning behind the codes. I typed up these notes into theoretical memos and compared them with code descriptions from other phases, similar to Strauss’s description of axial coding (Strauss, 1987). At the end of my observations, I went back through the descriptions and codes to confirm and expand the theories I had developed.

It is impossible and naïve to consider that any principle or pattern is true all the time, so researchers must make a point to consider and actively look for disconfirming evidence and inconsistencies in the analysis (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Erickson, 1986; Heath & Street, 2006; Purcell-Gates, 2004). These points often provide the richest data and can give the researcher a better understanding of what is going on (Bowen, 2008). When confronted with inconsistencies, researchers must ask what is different between the

⁸ See Appendix H for observation code list
situations. Finding these times can help expand and refine what the researcher has learned. The existence of disconfirming cases can mean that either the researcher’s theory about what is going on is incorrect or there is a previously unseen nuance in the pattern (Anderson-Levitt, 2006). In looking for disconfirming evidence, I tested and questioned the theories I had developed.

Validity of the Research

One of the primary criticisms regarding ethnography and many other qualitative research perspectives is that it is too subjective and therefore the validity of the research is questionable (Bredo, 2006). Especially when the possibility of different theoretical lenses is broached, critics will ask how one can really know the interpretation is accurate to what was really happening. While it is true that an ethnographer’s study cannot present numbers and mathematical equations to prove validity, it is possible and even vital to ensure that the researcher is really describing what is going on in that society (Purcell-Gates, 2004).

This is one reason it’s important that I did not use the data to prove a theoretical standpoint, but rather used theory as a tool for explaining. I needed to allow what was there to mold theory, not the other way around and not lose sight that the goal in ethnography was to understand and therefore represent the participants’ point of view (Bredo, 2006).

To this end, participant-observation provided authority, because through participating and being in the site, I was gaining personal experience (Clifford, 1988). Godley (2003) had spent enough time in the class that she knew how things happened during class discussions and could point out patterns easier. Smith’s (2008) interest in
literacy and identity was aroused because of what she saw in the classroom, so it truly was her observations that informed her theories. Similarly, the fact that I was there and recording what was actually happening afforded validity to the data collection, and because the patterns arose from the data.

It was important not to rely solely on my observations, however, because that was only one data source. Triangulation allowed me to confirm and disconfirm theories through looking at multiple data sources (Bowen, 2008; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Lillis, 2008; Purcell-Gates, 2004). Grote (2006) was able to confirm the divide between school and vernacular literacies by studying students’ written work and interviewing the students, teachers and parents to understand their points of view. To this end, I used conversations and interviews with students and teachers to confirm and disconfirm what I was seeing in the classroom. Casual conversations with teachers throughout the days also helped me clarify and hone my theories. Document analysis also deepened and confirmed and disconfirmed my observations.

Valid and ethical ethnographic research is always focused on finding the participants’ points of view, and researchers can use what Purcell-Gates (2004) calls “informant checking” and others call member checking to ensure accurate representation. Although some cultural practices are so ingrained the members themselves may not be able to articulate them, it was still important to make sure I was on the right track. Member-checking proved to be somewhat difficult, because I needed to word questions in such a way that it didn’t seem as though I was criticizing. In interviews, I told teachers what areas I was focusing on. During interviews and casual conversations, I asked Donna and Susan about various statements they had made and told them what I was seeing with
students. In checking with them, I was able to clarify what I was seeing and better gain
their points of view.

Member-checking with the students proved to be somewhat more difficult. Because the
students were so young, they sometimes struggled to articulate their thoughts and I
sometimes struggled to fully explain what I wanted to know without confusing them or
leading them to think I expected certain answers. As I asked questions, I altered
interview questions that seemed confusing. Most of my student member-checking
centered on asking students how they felt or what they thought about issues teachers had
already discussed with me, such as whether or not they had choices or what counted as
reading. These questions served to confirm or disconfirm my own observations and
teachers’ statements.

In the following chapters, I discuss the results of my analysis, beginning with a
description of common literacy events in each classroom in Chapter Four. My initial goal
in Donna and Susan’s classrooms was to develop an understanding of what literacy
events were typical during the literacy block. This enabled me to better understand what
was typical so I could see patterns in the events and interactions. Before entering their
classrooms, I analyzed the curriculum in order to gain an understanding of what I might
find. Not only did this make my observations easier, but it also enabled me to see how the
teachers diverged from the curriculum and how their decisions demonstrated their
personal beliefs regarding literacy. In Chapter Five, I address the themes and practices I
found in Donna and Susan’s classrooms, and how their personal beliefs influenced
classroom literacy practices.
Chapter 4: Common Literacy Events

In identifying classroom literacy events, my goal was to understand both classrooms as distinct sites. Before observing Donna and Susan’s classes, however, I examined the curriculum to understand what possible literacy events I might find. Because the curriculum was required, I took the lens that these were prescribed literacy events and the curriculum writers intended these events to be enacted as they were described. These literacy events were structured according to weeks and days and each event was focused on a specific skill.

Following the identification of the prescribed literacy events in the curriculum, I observed both classroom and identified common literacy events in both Donna and Susan’s classrooms. Classrooms and the curriculum included introductory events or morning work which was usually somewhat related to the day’s work. Following that was instructional time, which, in both the curriculum and classrooms, involved the teacher directly instructing and directing students’ activities in whole-group events. Small group events involved students being divided according to achievement levels, either below, at, or above the expected achievement level. Center events were reserved for students to do a variety of independent activities. Other independent work involved worksheets or assigned readings and other writings. In the following chapter, I describe common events in the curriculum and Donna and Susan’s classes. There were many similarities between the classrooms and how Donna and Susan used the curriculum, but the literacy events in
each classroom were distinct from both each other and the events prescribed in the curriculum.

Curriculum events

The curriculum was divided into 6 units, or themes: Count on me, Doing our best, Changing times, Dream big, Better together, and Seek and find. Within these units, stories and other texts were selected to connect with the theme. Each theme was divided into 5 5-day lessons, each of which was centered on a single story, group of spelling words, and vocabulary words. Activities were designed to relate to the week’s story and words. In addition to the teacher’s edition, the curriculum materials included sets of leveled texts, workbooks called Balancing Act books, and student textbooks. Because the whole curriculum was from Harcourt’s Story Town series, the teachers generally referred to the student editions as their Story Town books, which is how they are referred to here.

Weekly schedule

Every lesson lasted a week, with different activities building off previous days (see Appendix M). Each day included introductory activities, such as a question of the day, poem or short story to be read aloud, and high frequency word work. Word work included phonics patterns, spelling word work and high frequency word practice. Skills and strategies activities were based on reading strategies such as comprehension, fluency and vocabulary work. During this time, the weekly story would be read and discussed. Small group work was included, most of which involved reading texts on different levels, although some differentiated word work was also suggested. The final group of activities was focused on language arts, including grammar, proofreading and writing work. Each prescribed literacy event contained an image of a stopwatch which showed how long the
activity was expected to take. Objectives, samples of texts and instructions were also included.

Each week involved a long text around which vocabulary words and comprehension events centered. These texts were both fiction and nonfiction. Most stories were from trade books, such as “Arthur’s Reading Race,” by Marc Brown, from the popular Arthur series and Arnold Lobel’s “Frog and Toad All Year.”

Every fifth week was a review week, in which students did not read a trade story, but instead read a Readers’ Theater text, which was created solely for the curriculum and had no listed author. Readers’ Theater stories were written as short plays, usually with 4-6 roles and the primary purpose was for students to practice fluency. Students were to be divided into groups and practice reading, first listening to the teacher read it, then over the course of the week, gradually reading more independently until the fifth day, on which each group was to perform a section of the play.

**Introductory events**

Each day included three 5-minute warm-up routines which often related to the weekly story. The objective of the Question of the Day was for students to “listen attentively and respond appropriately to oral communication” and included a wide variety of questions relating to students’ favorite stories, preferred genre, morning routines, favorite animals and hypothetical questions. Each question had two or three suggested prompts for teachers to help children brainstorm answers. Students were expected to answer the questions following specific formulas. For example, with the question “What is your favorite quiet time of the day,” the response formula is “My favorite quiet time is ________. When things are quiet, I like to ________.”
The next warm-up routine involved the teacher reading aloud a short story or poem. Poems were all kept in a large flip book and short stories were either read aloud with no visual or put on transparencies. The objective of this activity varied, including listening for a set purpose or identifying rhymes or other word patterns.

The Word Wall activity objective was to review 5 selected high-frequency words, starting with words from first grade and gradually including second grade words from previous lessons.

*Instructional time*\(^9\)

Instructional events were divided up into several 15-30 minute events and included a focus on phonics and spelling patterns, reading, comprehension strategies, listening comprehension, vocabulary, grammar and writing. Most of these events were designed to be whole-group and teacher-directed and followed very predictable patterns (see Appendix N for an instructional event sample).

Lessons began with a Teach/Model section, in which the teacher was to introduce the concept for the week. Teachers were directed to tell students the words for the week or describe the texts they were to read. These sections often included a “think aloud” section, two or three scripted sentences the teachers were to say as if they were explaining their own thoughts. For example, a Comprehension event focused on character identification directed teachers to say

\(^9\)From a sociocultural standpoint, the concepts of instruction and learning are fluid and difficult to pinpoint. Because people are constantly influencing and being influenced by others, participants can be said to always be learning and that school time is always instructional time. For the purpose of understanding the literacy events in these two classrooms and the curriculum, I looked to the *intent* and expressed purpose of the events. With that in mind, it became clear that there were times in the day that were intended for deliberate teaching, where students were expected to learn specific concepts and skills. It is these times I refer to as “instructional” times. Within the instructional time were different practices, many of which, in the classrooms, centered on specific locations in the room.
As I read a story, I think about what the story is mostly about. I pay attention to what the main character wants or needs. I look for that character’s problem or challenge. Then I look for details that tell me more about how the main character solves the problem or meets the challenge. Those details help me decide the main idea.

Following Teach/Model sections were usually Guided Practice, in which the teacher was to demonstrate a skill or concept, often using graphic organizers. In these sections, the teacher modeled the concept and activity process, inviting input from students.

Although not every event contained a Guided Practice section, each event included a Practice/Apply section in which students practiced the skill without the teacher’s assistance. These activities included students reading words aloud, verbally answering questions or writing out sentences. Although these were sometimes listed as “independent” practice, their responses were often to be in front of the whole class or partners.

Several days involved review activities, in which the teacher was directed to remind students of previously discussed concepts and often demonstrating the process. Day five of each week, and week five of the whole theme were mostly devoted to review activities, in which the teacher reinforced previously discussed skills and students practiced them or were assessed on them.

These events were often rigidly set and rarely varied in teacher and students’ prescribed activities. Participants did not do the same thing every day, but over the weeks, they encountered activities from a set repertoire. Although some activities,
particularly writing, called for extensive student input, most events were primarily
teacher-focused, with the teacher as the center of attention and students passively
listening unless they were directed to answer.

*Seatwork*

Other than the short practice/apply activities, the suggested schedule did not
specifically describe events in which students were to work independently, but several
event categories included worksheets for students to practice skills and concepts. These
worksheets were intended for differentiated instruction and divided according to students’
perceived ability levels.

Worksheets were mostly used for phonics and spelling work, vocabulary, and
comprehension concepts. A frequent text form involved students choosing words from a
word bank to complete sentences. Comprehension worksheets called for students to read
short stories and either answer questions or complete charts relating to the concepts such
as the main idea, characters or setting.

Each worksheet was designed for a separate group, either below-level, on-level or
advanced, and varied in the amount of content and complexity of work. Below-level
worksheets frequently involved pictures that connected strongly to the meaning of the
text. On-level and advanced worksheets called for more text creation and contained few
images. These worksheets also called for students to write more, supplying their own
ideas rather than circling or copying words already in the page. These worksheets used
more complex instructions, such as referring to paragraphs where below-level worksheets
referred to stories.
The only other seatwork events provided in the curriculum were supplementary workbooks referred to in the resource list but not mentioned in the lessons. The most common workbook was the Balancing Act book, individual books for each student to write in. Similar in form to the worksheets, the workbook content revolved around vocabulary words, high frequency words, and short stories related to the weekly reading. Word work involved students reading sentences and filling in the correct word. Every page of each story contained a text box with one or two comprehension questions that students were to answer before going on.

*Small group work*

As was mentioned previously, some instruction was designed to address students’ different levels of achievement. Along with the three main groups, below-level, on-level and advanced, a fourth group, for English Language Learners, was included. For each group, the teacher was to tell students read a leveled text and then verbally respond to comprehension questions.

Figure 2: Below-level and Advanced additional instruction
On occasion, whole-class events contained suggestions for how to differentiate instruction to each level, particularly for phonics and spelling events (see example below). Below-level attention typically involved the teacher re-teaching concepts demonstrating them again. For advanced students, the teacher was instructed to provide them with more complex work.

Centers

Another event included in the curriculum but not described in the schedule or daily lesson was that of literacy centers. Intended so other students could do independent work while the teacher was conducting small group events, literacy centers involved several different activities designed to supplement the weekly lessons. At the listening center, students read a story along with a recording. Other centers called for students to read a passage and write a response to it; practice the weekly writing format; do word work on the computer; and sort or manipulate spelling words. These activities, more than any other in the curriculum, were highly individualized.

Summary

The events prescribed in the curriculum were highly teacher-focused. The teacher was to be the initiator of events and direct students’ actions. With the teacher as the focus of events, students were represented as passive recipients of actions, practicing the skills the teacher demonstrated. Any student action was to be guided and controlled by the teacher. For the most part, events were whole-group, but small group attention was included. Because of the lack of attention given to it, however, the implication in the curriculum was that independent seatwork was unimportant.
Despite representing the teacher as the main focus of decisions and actions, the curriculum was highly directive toward the teacher. Scripted texts and suggested phrases guided much of the teacher’s actions. Events even included answers to simple questions that the teacher should know, such as when the teacher was to ask students how to change the response was given (see example below).

![Figure 3: Scripted word-making activity](image)

There seemed to be a deliberate attempt in the curriculum to include references to diversity. Several stories contained characters with varying skin tones, both in the trade book stories and stories created specifically for the curriculum. Sample sentences in instructional events frequently contained names that originated from various languages.
Overall, the curriculum represented a classroom that was divided into distinct events and controlled by the teacher, who in turn was guided by curriculum direction. These events were represented as ideals, but the way they played out in real-life classrooms largely depended upon the teachers. Donna and Susan’s unique classroom events are described below.

Common classroom events

A typical day in both classrooms involved several distinct literacy events, each which had its own purposes and centered on different kinds of text. On the surface, literacy events in Donna and Susan’s classrooms were very similar to each other and the curriculum, but with a closer look, it was clear that there were distinct differences in how Susan and Donna defined literacy and what they valued. The following literacy events were found in both classrooms on a regular basis:

- Morning work: the time before the day officially began
• Instructional time
  o Rug time: often where whole-group instruction took place. In both classes much of the instruction events took place on classroom area rugs, where students would sit while looking up at the teacher, who sat in a chair next to an easel with chart paper. These events included spelling, grammar, comprehension and fluency instruction.
  o Seated instruction time: this often differs from rug instruction time in use of text and purpose. Susan used this time for spelling review on the Smart Board, while Donna used the time for going over morning work and a few weeks in March when students were prohibited from getting out of their seats, even for rug time.
• Seatwork: this is where assigned work was completed, including worksheets, answering questions from readings, or other writings, done mostly independently of the teacher’s help
• Small-group work: often centered on reading, these events included students reading in set groups or pairs at their seats or reading leveled texts with the teacher in set groups.
• Center work: students doing different types of work at various locations around the room

Although both classrooms had similar literacy events on the surface, they were constructed in unique ways by both Donna and Susan. Because these events were part of the classroom culture, I present them as such in the following sections, rather than
conducting a comparison on an event-by-event basis. In the following sections, I describe typical events in each classroom, highlighting themes that emerged.

Donna’s class

Morning work

Each day began with “pre”—instruction time, during which students did assigned work before the day officially began. Between 8:45 and 9:30, students would come in, hang up their coats and put their homework in the homework tub before sitting at their seats, where their work was waiting for them. Students were also responsible for indicating their lunch choice on the chart during this time, although Donna generally had to remind students of this. “Everybody did lunch count, right? It should be the first thing you do, after you turn in your homework.” On occasion, the morning work related to social studies or science, particularly when the science or social studies theme was connected to reading time, but most of the time the work was an extension to the more “official” reading time, either in doing story maps, proofreading or reading books. This work usually served to supplement the previous night’s homework or the week’s seatwork. A few times students worked on writing or completed comprehension questions about their Time for Kids homework reading. Just after the beginning of the year, each student received a subscription to Time for Kids, a short magazine published by Time magazine, geared toward children.

From the beginning of the year, one of the expectations was that students work toward understanding and identifying the elements of a fiction story, so Donna frequently assigned story maps, which she often called book reports, (see figure below) to be filled out using the assigned texts from the night before. These texts were usually very short
stories, written specifically for the curriculum and leveled. Generally, there were two stories per booklet, so students were able to choose which one they wanted to use for the story map. Students were to fill in the story maps by identifying the setting, characters, beginning, middle and end. As the year progressed, the students were expected to complete the maps in more progressively complex ways. In the first few months, students were allowed to draw pictures with just a word or two as labels. Gradually, students were expected to provide numerous complete sentences describing the story, with pictures being treated as “extra.”

![Figure 5: Story map](image)

Another instructional theme in the curriculum and district portfolio expectations was that students were expected to learn to proofread and edit their writings, so Donna began assigning commercially prepared worksheets with errors included for students to find. The texts were usually nonfiction and on occasion were related to topics students had been studying in social studies or reading about in their Story Town books. By early
March, Donna began using students’ writing assignments as proofreading work. When she introduced it, she told them, “This is actually someone's writing here. This is what somebody turned in to me. I am going to be using your writing for proofreading from now on. Number one, if we have to proofread it, it means you didn't, and number two, we're helping you out.”

The most common activity during this time was reading, either from a library book or students’ book boxes. Book boxes were not officially part of the Story Town curriculum, but a method Donna had used for a long time. Once she determined students’ reading levels, Donna collected several books of different topics and lengths written on that particular level. Each student had their own standing file holder with leveled books for them to choose from. These books were both trade books and texts written for the curriculum. Book boxes were either assigned as the main activity or as the fallback activity whenever the assigned work was finished.

*Instructional time*

Donna’s spelling instructional time was generally quite brief. When introducing the spelling words, she held them up, asking what the words are and what they mean, and then placing them in the pocket chart on the wall. Once all the words were in the pocket chart, she asked students what patterns they saw, and after a few suggestions, focused on sorting them according to the spelling pattern of the week. At irregular times, Donna would employ the word-changing activity in the curriculum, writing students’ responses on the chart paper. Most of the time, however, other than brief spelling reviews, Donna used instructional time for grammar and comprehension work, which was also more of a review and introduction of concepts to be explored later in worksheets.
Often during this time Donna would read trade books that either related to a topic they were discussing, or that she would use for writing and comprehension activities. Donna explained the decision to add trade books in an interview. Because she believed the content was too confusing for the students, or unimportant to the purpose of the text, she would alter the curriculum to suit her students’ needs. In an interview, Donna explained that at times students became confused over certain details in stories and it took too much time to explain and drew the focus away from the purpose of the event. For example, a story that was intended in the curriculum to demonstrate setting had aspects students were unfamiliar with, such as yachts, marinas and oceanfront images. Most students had never seen the ocean and she found it took too long to explain what everything was, so she would use a more familiar book to teach setting instead. “There’s too much lack of base knowledge, they don’t have that knowledge to do that story.” When this happened, Donna altered the lessons to teach the intended content with different texts.

Donna felt her students were lacking in some important background knowledge and skills and that the curriculum lacks elements that address this, so she would add elements to instructional time not included in the set curriculum. One activity was called “Reading with Strategies,” which Donna had as part of a curriculum about a decade before, which “no matter who the student is it always holds their attention...” “It fills in the gaps for students who should have but didn’t get it in kindergarten or first grade and gives more practice to those who got it.”

One of the events from the curriculum that varied widely was when Donna and her students read the texts from the StoryTown books for comprehension and fluency
work. These events followed a few different patterns, ranging from reading as a whole group to reading in pairs. Donna would often introduce the story with all the students on the rug, doing an extensive “picture walk,” in which she talked about and solicited information for what could be occurring in the story. In the following quote, Donna was taking her students through an introduction of “The Great Ballgame,” by Joseph Bruchac, a pour quoi tale.

Oh there's a bat, which side is she gonna be on? I think you're right, he's going to be in the middle. Have you ever heard someone say I'll Indian wrestle you for it? … Who thinks the animals won? … Who thinks the birds won …Okay, so what we have to do is we have to read the story to find out who won the game and what they were arguing about. If pour quoi is a why story, we need to read to figure out why. (Donna, 10/18/2010)

During the picture walk Donna would give clues about key elements in the story, often phrased in a questioning way. Following the picture walk Donna would either have them all read together, round-robin style or in smaller groups and pairs. Nonfiction or Reader’s Theater texts were most commonly used for round-robin readings, although Donna did assign students to read Reader’s Theater passages in larger groups at times. The most common reading time was when Donna assigned students to read in pairs, described below in the Seatwork section.

Instructional time in Donna’s class was always very teacher-directed: the teacher handled and physically created texts. When students did contribute to text creations, Donna decided whether or not their responses were sufficient enough to add to the chart paper and sometimes reworded their responses. Although students had their own books
when they read the StoryTown books for comprehension and fluency work, their readings were carefully directed.

_**Seatwork**_

At the end of the instructional time, Donna would always go over the students’ seatwork for the day, showing them the worksheets and explaining what each worksheet would require. Most of the time, Donna had already placed their work inside their work folders, which also contained any unfinished work from previous days. Often, Donna would talk about the first couple of answers and would comment on how “easy” the work was.

Most of the reading block was devoted to students’ seatwork, during which they completed worksheets from the curriculum. Most of these worksheets were spelling, grammar and vocabulary work. These usually involved students choosing words from word banks to complete a sentence. Other worksheets included comprehension and text format work (see the figures on the following page for examples).

Although it wasn’t included in the curriculum, Donna introduced handwriting worksheets for students to practice with, one letter at a time. In part she did this because she believed students needed it, but also because, although it wasn’t in the curriculum, handwriting was included on the grade cards. When Donna introduced the handwriting work, she told the students she would begin teaching cursive in January, but only to those students whose printing was good enough. Only six students were included in the cursive group and had a cursive worksheet in addition to their regular work. These were considered “extra” work and to be completed after all the other work was finished. “If all you have left is cursive, bring it to me. Cursive doesn't count. It's extra.”
Except for the cursive papers, students were allowed to complete their work in any order they chose, as long as they completed their work before lunch, which usually gave them an hour and a half to two hours. If students had any unfinished work, they were expected to complete it at this time also. Despite the fact that Donna recognized some students were struggling readers and had difficulty completing tasks, everyone was expected to complete the same work in the same amount of time. If students finished their work before time was up, they were to read, write in their writer’s workshop folder or help other students. Unfinished work meant students “owed” Donna recess time, which was directly after the reading block. “I know some people that are going to be paying me some extra time.” Gradually, Donna began to allow students to go to recess even if they hadn’t finished their work, as long as they had demonstrated an effort to work hard and finish. This sense of students “paying” her for not doing their work changed staying in from recess from a punishment into a barter system. Donna was implying that students had some freedom regarding what they did with their free time and if they chose not to complete the work, the result was that their time and work became commercialized and they had to pay back what they “owed.”

Always, when students finished assigned work, they were to complete unfinished work, read a book or work on their writing folders. Donna frequently told students “there is always work to do.” This sentiment of “you're never done. You can either write another story or go read” reinforced to students the attitude that they were at school to work. Putting it at the end of assigned work, however, gave the implication that independent reading and writing weren’t “real” work, but rather something to do until they were given the next assignment.
When you are done with your center, what are you supposed to do? Go to the next center. When you're done with all the centers, start your seatwork, and then writing or reading, until I tell you the next thing to do. What do you always do when you're done? ...writing or reading.  

(Donna, 09/30/2010)

Although worksheets took up the bulk of students’ seatwork time, they were not always from the prepared curriculum, and were instead from Donna’s collection. In another way that Donna altered the curriculum to suit her wishes, she would include work related to holidays (although both Donna and Susan assumed the 30-week curriculum was designed for holiday activities to be included). On one such day in November, after students had begun learning about Native American customs, Donna read *The Popcorn Book* by Tomie de Paola and declared the day would be all about corn. Students had been learning about Thanksgiving and Native Americans (Donna had also set up a small
teepee for students to read in) so their work for the day included reading a short passage about different ways Native Americans made popcorn and writing about it, ordering pictures in a story, coloring in a picture of an ear of corn using number sequences, and using adjectives to describe popcorn. She made similar lesson changes during Halloween, Christmas, and February, for both Valentine’s Day and Black History Month.

Some changes in the routine were made to fulfill other curricular requirements. In addition to the weekly learning goals, students were also expected to complete a portfolio writing piece every 9 weeks. Although I was not present when Donna explained it to her class, Susan described it to her class in the following quote early in the year:

All right, we're going to start working on what we need to learn to write our portfolio piece. Every nine weeks you write an important piece that we put in an orange folder. This goes in the office with your grades. [This folder will follow them and be with official notes] It's very important information about you and it's important for next year's teacher to know how you write. (Susan, 10/11/2010)

During my observations students worked on letter writing, personal narratives, descriptions, and expository pieces. Most writing instruction consisted of demonstrating formats for sentences, turning single sentences in to short paragraphs and teacher modeling. For most of these, students were given a limited number of topics to choose from. For example, when it was time for expository writing, Donna gave them a packet about whales and students were allowed to choose which whale they wanted to write about. Letter writing involved writing letters to Santa’s elves (fifth-graders who wrote back to them) and to a celebrity of their choice. Portfolio writing was often the most
frustrating to students because it was the least teacher- or text-directed. They struggled to know precisely what to do when there were no clear step-by-step directions.

**Small group work**

While students were working on their seatwork, Donna would often call them by name to go to the rug for small group reading time. These groups were determined by reading levels and Donna’s practices varied depending on which group she was with. Students would always read a short text, and sometimes all groups would read the same thing, and others they would read different texts. Many of these decisions were based on whether or not Donna felt the “lower” group could handle the on-level texts.

Each group would go through a “picture walk,” looking at the pictures on each page and talking about what might be happening in the story based on the picture, sometimes with Donna and other times by themselves. Following that, the “advanced” group would read books silently to themselves, as would the “on-level” group most of the time, while the “below-level” students would read together, taking turns reading pages. A few times Donna did this with the “on-level” group as well. Once they were finished, students were to put their books in their mailboxes to take home and read on their own. This meant the “advanced” group often finished at different times, while the other groups had to wait for everyone to finish before they could go back to their work.

Other small group work also included reading but was much different in structure. In order to help students practice their fluency, Donna would assign students to read the week’s StoryTown selection in pairs or—when the passage was a Reader’s Theater—in groups. These groups were by no means set and students could often choose who they worked with and where they sat. During the times students read in pairs, they would take
advantage of the freedom and sit on the floor together. Few students chose to sit in chairs, and when they did, they often moved the chairs to another part of the room, away from the tables. Following these readings, students were assigned the comprehension questions on the back to be completed together, one of the few times students turned in work completed with someone else.

Centers

One of the most interesting social dynamics of the classroom was the use of centers. These events were not very regular, however. Toward the beginning of the year, centers were the most common literacy events in Donna’s class, but beginning in October, except for holidays and occasional Fridays, she limited their use, in part because of a change in how much space she had to work with. During Halloween, Donna set up a “Bat Cave,” a small tent-like construction of brown butcher paper with bats hung inside and a basket of books and flashlights inside. Students who had finished their work, or had worked hard and were mostly finished, could go in two at a time and read. In November, the Bat Cave was replaced with a teepee. While these did not take up a large amount of space, they blocked two of the computers and an area where students practiced spelling during center time.

During the week before Christmas Donna introduced some holiday-themed centers, and reintroduced regular center work after the first of the year, but mostly on Fridays. Most of these holiday themes related to Christmas. There was a slight mention of Kwanzaa but no mention of other holidays. It was expected that all students would celebrate Christmas. Holiday-themed centers included making Christmas cards for their fifth-grade book buddies, coloring ornaments and making pinecone bird feeders and
Kwanzaa mats (which Donna said they could make with red, black and green for Kwanzaa or just red and green to be “Christmassy”). Other than holiday times, typical center events included listening center; poetry center; science center; computer center; and spelling center. The spelling center was geared toward word practice, where students copied the words into charts, made the words with stamps, and wrote it several times in marker “rainbow” style. They then had to have a friend help them check their oral spelling. Poetry centers involved students highlighting specific kinds of words, such as verbs and nouns, and illustrating the poems. Donna was often quite clear on what kinds of pictures were acceptable illustrations. Realistic pictures that represented items specifically mentioned in the poems were accepted, but images that were not in the texts were not accepted. For example, when drawing pictures for a poem about bats, students were allowed to color their bats black, brown or gray, but no other colors.

Science centers varied, but often involved students observing natural artifacts and writing descriptions of them in worksheets. Listening centers involved listening to books on tape and answering questions about them. Students seemed to enjoy most centers, but especially the computers, where they were able to play math and word games. During portfolio work, writing was also a center, where students would work on writing and revising their portfolio pieces.

Sometimes center participation was highly structured, with students being placed in set groups and having a specific order of where they were supposed to go at certain times, but gradually Donna allowed students to choose where they wanted to go and merely set rules for how many students were allowed at one table at a time. Each student
was responsible for completing all the centers within a set amount of days, but they were allowed to choose which ones they worked on when.

Contrary to the curriculum’s focus on teacher actions, Donna tried to structure her class to be focused on her students and their personal needs. Every student had a responsibility to do their own work and manage their own time, but they were allowed to work with each other and help each other. Direct instruction was kept to a minimum and Donna preferred to give students space to decide in what order they completed their work rather than structure each moment. Despite the fact that they used exactly the same curriculum materials and generally followed exactly the same schedule, Susan’s class structure was quite different.

Susan’s class

Morning work

Similar to Donna’s class, students in Susan’s class came in, hung up their coats and backpacks in the coat area and sat down at their desks, where their worksheets were waiting for them. In Susan’s class, however, students generally completed math worksheets for their morning seatwork. During the holiday seasons, the work was sometimes related to that particular holiday, such as coloring a picture for Halloween or working on a packet of Thanksgiving or Christmas papers. On rare occasions, students edited sentences, but the general practice was for students to complete math problems. The pre-reading time in Susan’s class generally only lasted until 9:10 or 9:15, when she began the “official” classroom time.

At the end of the morning work time, Susan would sometimes lead the class in correcting the papers together. Frequently, however, she directed her students to put their
names on their papers and turn them in, without checking if their papers were finished. Both of these occasions were represented by Susan’s sentiment of “whether you're done or not, I need you all to have your paper out. I'm just going to go down the row so you'd better be prepared.” After they had gone through the paper, Susan would sometimes the students, “Now, everyone should have the correct answers. Give yourself a 3 and give it to your supply manager.”

*Instructional time*

Susan’s spelling instruction time was generally longer than Donna’s, and she more often followed the set curriculum structure, beginning with an introduction or review of the week’s spelling words and high frequency words. She would either point to and read the words which students would repeat, or simply point to the words as students called them out. At the beginning of the week, Susan would call for students to help her sort the words into specific spelling patterns and then talk about how to remember which words are spelled with which patterns or tell them “it’s up to you to remember which [pattern] it is.” The following is an example from my field notes of a typical instructional event.

Susan called the students over to sit on the rug, sat in her chair and rolled down her pocket chart to display the spelling words and high frequency words. Looking around, she said, ‘Let me see here. Joy. You're sitting nice and quiet. Will you come up and point to our spelling words for us?’ Joy walked to the front and pointed to the high frequency and spelling words as the students read. Susan corrects them a few times.

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10 Every student in Susan’s class had a job, which generally changed each week. One student in each row was assigned the job of supply manager, who passed out and collected papers.
Once they were finished, Susan asked students how they could sort the words, which all had oa or ow and called up students to move cards one at a time. When the words were all sorted, Susan commented that now “they're all in the right spot” and started telling students what words to write so they could work on changing words. “All right, Boat. Write boat. All right, how do we spell boat?...Okay, what are we going to do if we want to change boat to float?” Following several word changes, Susan announced, “Okay, erase your boards and I'm going to say some sentences and you need to fill in the blank. Okay, the first sentence Tim put on his blank because it was cold outside.” Students were to write the missing word and then spell it when called on. (Field notes, 10/27/2010)

Susan frequently employed the use of individual white boards, markers and erasers for students during this time for various purposes. During the event described above, students were expected to write individual words and change them accordingly. These events were some of the most obviously teacher-directed events in Susan’s classroom, because all students were expected to perform exactly the same actions and have the same answer and were told precisely what to do at all times. Most students enjoyed doing board work, although several used it as an opportunity to draw rather than work. At one point Susan went so quickly students didn’t take the time to perform all the actions and instead waited until someone else answered and copied what Susan wrote on the chart paper. On occasion Susan would call out students for not working, but several realized that as long as it looked like they were working, they could write what they liked. About halfway through the year, students were told, “If I see you drawing on your
board, you're flipping to yellow, you're back in your seat and you lose 5 minutes of recess.”

Similar to Donna’s classroom practices, comprehension and fluency work generally occurred on the rug, with work in the Story Town books. The class would read texts together, sometimes as a whole class or other times Susan would alternate boys and girls, or have one student at a time read. In doing this, Susan was employing a guided reading approach, where she would read a text by herself the first day and then over the course of the week would slowly take herself out of the reading. Following the curriculum closely, Susan would ask comprehension questions as they read and sometimes ask comprehension questions at the end. She sometimes had them write the answers, especially when she was conducting small group activities.

But that’s boring to them and it’s boring to me, so I struggle with that. I know they need to know the comprehension, but without just sitting and talking about it, or them writing it down, how else would I know that they’re comprehending what’s going on? I think often times, I think it’s more you know, if I want to speed things up then we just sit and we answer the questions on the rug or whatever. If I have some time then they can sit down and practice their writing and their complete sentences and writing the answers to the comprehension questions. (Susan, 10/12/2010)

Fluency practice blended in with the story reading, as the procedures involved students reading the stories repeatedly. Sometimes Susan would conduct fluency practice as described above, but when she didn’t do comprehension, she would put on a CD of the story and students would listen/read along with it. This activity was one that carried over.
from rug instructional time to seat instructional time, as Susan varied where she conducted it depending on surrounding events.

More often than Donna, Susan conducted instruction from students’ seats, rather than just the rug. Most of this instruction was focused on the Smart Board, which both teachers received this year. The curriculum contained spelling and grammar activities that required students to manipulate words on the board, activities students greatly enjoyed. Because of this enjoyment, Susan tried to make sure all students received at least one turn, but if they misbehaved or did not follow the rules precisely, they lost their turn. In one instance, Susan skipped a few students who had called out answers or talked without raising their hands. She made this threat at other times as well: “all right, if they are making noise, skip them. They do not get to do boards today. If they are talking, skip them.”

Seatwork

Although Susan hardly ever used the worksheets from the curriculum, she did frequently use curriculum materials for seatwork. At the beginning of the year, she assigned stories and work pages from their Balancing Act books, which included stories with short comprehension questions and spelling, high frequency and vocabulary work practice pages. This work was almost always assigned while Susan conducted small group readings on the rug and was therefore to be silent and independent.

Gradually Susan began implementing more writing activities such as open response and story creation. Some of this was in response to the 9-week portfolio expectations and others were in an attempt to make the work more personal and meaningful to the students. She knew they greatly disliked working in the Balancing Act
books and instead tried to find activities that she and they would like. In contrast to Donna’s class, where students were relatively certain of the daily structure, events in Susan’s class changed frequently and texts were highly varied.

The most common seatwork for students was writing, first practice for their portfolio letter-writing pieces. After introducing letter formats, Susan assigned several scenarios for students to write practice letters, such as pretending to be visiting a farm. Later portfolio pieces, such as reports on animals, personal narratives and journals were more connected to students’ lives. Susan also began to assign illustrations and texts related to students’ readings and grammar topics as well. After reading *A Chair for My Mother*, Susan asked her students to illustrate their own chair and write a description of what kind of chair they would buy if they could.

The two weeks of mid-year testing in January gave Susan the most trouble, in part because classroom events were so teacher-directed and she needed to find activities they could do quietly without her assistance. Donna said this was a common problem in the school. “Ninety percent of what I hear people say is they make up packets so they can get testing done. They don’t actually continue the regular stuff because it’s so hard to test and get done.”

**Small group work**

Similar to Donna’s class, Susan conducted small groups during times when students were occupied with silent, independent seatwork and grouped them according to test scores and reading levels. Some differences existed in that, similar to the rest of Susan’s classroom events, students either read round robin style or chorally, rather than at their own paces. In addition, Susan occasionally did extra spelling work with the groups,
tailored to each level. Students in the lower reading levels received a review of words, while students in higher and middle levels received additional instruction on more advanced words or activities. Although Donna’s small groups tended to read the same text, Susan followed the curriculum more closely and assigned the different leveled texts to her students. Following small group work, Susan would sometimes add an activity that everyone would do that was connected to the texts they had read.

Small group events in Susan’s class seemed chaotic at times, when those not in the group struggled to complete their work. The following event occurred at the beginning of the year. Susan gave each student a color-coded leveled book, which all had the theme of being afraid. While students were at their seats, they were finishing Balancing Act work and waiting to be called. Susan called each group by the color of their book and read a story with them on the rug, asking questions now and then. Following the small group reading, students were given the assignment to draw and label a time when they were afraid. Some of those who were not at small group would get up and walk around, talking to one another and sharing their work. Eventually, everyone was given the task of drawing a time when they were afraid, but students finished at different rates because of their delays. Most of the time, Susan preferred to do small group work in the afternoons while students were doing math or science work on their own and kept reading time for whole-group work.

Susan often encouraged students to share their work with one another, either for pleasure or for assistance in proofreading. Proofreading a partner’s paper did not always turn out very well, because students were still struggling to know how to spell words and what words were incorrect so they frequently missed the errors their partners had made.
More often this time resulted in students reading one another’s’ papers and then talking about other things until the time was up. Frequently I would walk around and remind them of what they were supposed to be doing and get the response “I did!” A few times Susan introduced spelling practice games where students worked with a partner to sort words and picture cards, but these times were rare. Overall, most of the work in Susan’s class was individual.

Centers

At the beginning of the year, Susan used centers for students’ spelling and fluency practice, but, like most other events in her class, these were very teacher-controlled and homogenizing. Students were expected to complete the same work, at the same time, often with the same results. In contrast to Donna’s class, where students chose in what order they completed their work, students’ desks at that time were grouped together and she passed out one center to each group. The next day, groups received a different activity. Activities included making spelling words with Play-Doh, writing sentences, spelling words with letter cubes and reading stories into special phone receivers designed to echo students’ voices. Although most of these activities were supposed to be individual, because the students were facing one another and all doing the same things, they would talk and at times be loud, so Susan reduced the frequency of center use to occasional Fridays and afternoons.

Conclusion

The events described in the curriculum were presented as cumulative, with each event building upon the previous events and each event as necessary to student learning.
For Donna and Susan, however, events in the curriculum were merely guides, options for the teachers to choose.

Susan followed the set schedule for instruction much more closely than Donna, frequently reading the scripted portions word for word. Donna, on the other hand, limited and altered the instructional events. Sometimes she did this because she did not believe additional instructional time was necessary and instead wanted to give students the opportunity to practice the skills and concepts for themselves. Other times, she altered the events by adding texts and methods she preferred over those described in the curriculum.

Students’ seatwork also varied by classrooms. Donna mostly used the resources from the curriculum, while Susan typically used more writing activities that were related to the content but did not originate in the curriculum.

Overall, Donna’s classroom was primarily student-centered, with the focus on students completing their own work while the teacher aided them as necessary. Susan’s class, on the other hand, replicated the teacher-centered structure of the curriculum. In the following chapters, I present my analysis of the literacy practices of these two classrooms.
Chapter 5: Findings

As I stated in Chapter Two, this study was conducted from the theoretical framework that literacy is defined by participants and culturally situated. How participants use texts is bound up in many unspoken values and beliefs. With this perspective in mind, I sought to understand not only how participants use texts and define literacy, but also what values and beliefs they have relating to texts. Because the student-teacher relationship is one with vastly different levels of power, what participants had the right to control and define these practices was an important part. The following findings reflect my attempts to understand classroom literacy practices. I also tried to dig deeper and understand where those practices came from, who defined them and who resisted or accepted them.

In the following sections, I discuss my findings organized around the four facets of literacy practices I described in Chapter Two: literacy as local, global, social, and multiple. I have also added a fifth: literacy as agentive. In order to understand the classrooms as a whole, it was imperative to focus on the classrooms in part, segmenting practices in useful categories. The purpose of this analysis was not to prove that literacy can be seen as these five concepts; rather, they were the lenses through which I analyzed.

As I analyzed, I began to question “in what ways is literacy local? In what ways is literacy global, etc.” and through those questions, the following sections emerged. As I questioned how literacy practices were locally created, it became obvious that meaning was one of the most locally created constructs in both classrooms. Although meaning was
defined in the curriculum, Donna and Susan were the gatekeepers, determining how meaning was to be defined and negotiated. The most global influences were in the curriculum, and through the curriculum and administrative demands, students and teachers were expected to conform to set practices and ways of living.

As I examined what practices related to literacy as social, the concept of student responsibility arose, as teachers frequently reinforced to their students that they had responsibilities to themselves and others as they interacted with text. For the purposes of this study, the concept of literacy as multiple was limited to the multiple structures and purposes of alphabetic texts, so I also address the values associated with the creation and use of the many texts that were used within Donna and Susan’s classrooms. Finally, I address how teacher and student agency played out in these classroom literacy practices and how practices either helped or hindered the development of personal agency.

Meaning

As was mentioned in Chapter Two, because participants define texts and how they are used and valued in the classroom, literacy is a highly localized construct. Although these practices were created and managed by participants, this creation occurred in unequal power relations. Students had a say in negotiating local practices, but ultimately, the teachers structured literacy events and determined what had meaning and what was meaningful.

Within every event, meaning was locally created and depended upon Donna and Susan’s construction of meaning. I present three particular ways in which meaning was created, which are how literacy events were created and determined by the teachers; how
teachers and students defined what was meaningful; and how teachers represented the specific concept of being smart.

*Creation of literacy events*

In the creation of literacy events, participants mutually negotiate meaning and practices, but the creation of classroom literacy events hinged largely upon the teachers. Although both Donna and Susan were required to use the pre-determined curriculum set by the school district and were expected to follow the same schedule, they frequently altered lessons, teaching methods and content to suit their purposes, as was described in the previous chapter. They felt fortunate that there was so much material they could pick and choose what suited them best, but even with a variety of materials, they believed the curriculum was sometimes lacking and supplemented it with their own activities.

Susan and Donna designed literacy events based on their own preferences for conducting class and what they believed their students needed. These student needs were defined by teachers’ perceptions of student developmental ability\(^\text{11}\), achievement and acquired knowledge. Donna said her practices changed slightly with every new group of students, because what “worked” for some did not work for others. She said her students this year were “needier” than they had been in previous years. Susan rarely focused on vocabulary activities because she didn’t feel her students were ready for such words and instead focused more on spelling and high frequency words. Although both teachers recognized there was a predetermined knowledge base every student was expected to leave second grade with, they tailored their pacing, texts and events to what students needed at the time.

\(^{11}\) Although it is common now to refer to students’ achievement rather than innate ability levels, both teachers on occasion spoke of students’ achievement in terms of students’ ability. Because of this, I occasionally refer to students’ *perceived* ability.
Both teachers’ literacy event decisions were based on what knowledge they believed their students both needed and lacked. In adding lessons for Black History Month, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, Donna and Susan were demonstrating what areas of knowledge were important to them and what they believed should be important to their students. Although Susan said vocabulary was important, she did not consider it as vital as other areas of reading instruction.

As teachers, Donna and Susan had the responsibility of structuring classroom events and deciding what materials would be used, how they would be used, and who would be using them. Because of this, their definitions and values regarding literacy came out loud and clear. In Donna’s classroom, reading and writing were individual and students were responsible for their own work and learning. In Susan’s classroom, work and texts were teacher-directed. There was a uniformity of work within the events.

Despite the fact that, for the most part, Donna and Susan used the same curriculum, texts and instructional content, literacy events in both classrooms varied greatly. Events were created, structured and controlled by the teachers, based on their worldviews, practices and values.

*Negotiation of meaning*

Typically, all participants negotiate meaning in their communities, but in these classrooms, meaning was strongly defined and controlled by the teachers. Donna, Susan and their students had different understandings of what kinds of text had meaning and what made something meaningful. Both Susan and Donna had different perspectives on what had meaning. To Donna, every kind of text had meaning. She tried to communicate this to her students, that they should “read your cereal box, read the signs. That's reading.
I point out what reading really is. Nobody ever told me that. And nobody ever pointed out that I was actually reading when I could read the stop sign.” For Donna, reading was gaining meaning from texts, and all texts had meaning. When introducing spelling words, Donna always made a point of talking about what words mean, not just the patterns they were studying.

In Donna’s classroom, meaning was a variable construct, which could be challenged and changed. Several times during seatwork, students questioned the expected responses on the worksheets, which Donna encouraged.

You can’t assume it’s wrong. In fact you might be right. If you are actually thinking about it and putting down what you truly believe is the right answer, then it could be right…There was one the other day that one kid came up with an answer and another kid came up with an answer and they both made perfect sense. (Donna, 01/13/2011)

Such occasions happened frequently, as worksheets sometimes had ambiguous answers that could have been applied to multiple questions.

Sometimes this ambiguity confused students, who were used to questions having only one answer and Donna was also not always consistent with these expectations. One day, students were answering comprehension questions in pairs after reading the story Big Bushy Mustache. The thinking critically question asked “Do you think he will listen to his teacher next time and why?” to which Mariah and Keisha answered “no.” Donna sent their paper back to be fixed until they changed their answer to “yes” because the boy had learned his lesson to obey his teacher. Most of the time, however, she told students that there was no single “right” answer, and if students could explain how they arrived at
a particular answer, she accepted it. For Donna, the process which students used to get to the answer was more meaningful than the actual answer.

Meaning in Susan’s class was much more singular and connected to specific texts. In the following excerpt, Susan and her students had read a nonfiction story about dogs and students had answered the comprehension questions at the end. In this excerpt, Susan and the class were going over the work.

Susan: so if you didn't have this on your paper, you need to fix it right. There's only one answer to these questions, and it's up here...All right, last question.

Number four. Why did the author write the story "Dogs"?

Becca: she probably has a dog.

Susan: maybe, but I need a better reason. (Field notes, 09/23/2010)

Susan made it explicit to her students that they were expected to have only one answer and her answers were the guide and authority to follow. When answering the questions, students were providing correct answers or valid guesses based on prior knowledge, but they were not answers that directly came from the story, so Susan declared them incorrect. The final question was labeled an opinion question in the teacher’s manual, but only certain answers were acceptable opinions, as Susan explained that she needed a “better” reason for the author to write the story. In this event, the text was the source of meaning, in contrast to students’ knowledge or personal understandings. Susan played the role of the arbiter, judging whether or not students’ meaning matched the “real” answer.

The meaning texts have was variable and associated with whatever meaning with which they are attributed for a specific event. Susan occasionally implemented an aspect
of the curriculum for practicing spelling patterns which involved “nonsense” words. When she introduced these words, Susan explained, as the curriculum directed, that “these are nonsense words. They have no meaning.” Although it is true the words had no definition, they did indeed have meaning when placed in that context. They were used for a specific purpose and were meaningful pieces of text.

Meaning in Susan’s class was not only singular, but controlled by Susan. She treated events as if there was a single answer. While making their animal reports for their portfolios, the students in the back row, Derek, Grant and Becca stood their pencil boxes and textbooks up along the edges of their desks, so they created barriers between themselves. Derek turned to me and said, “Look, we all got our own office” and pretended another textbook was a computer. In setting up their own office-like workspaces, the students were creating a meaning that went beyond the local setting, but when Susan turned to them, she said, “What is with the books? Put ‘em in your desk. No one is going to copy you. Everyone’s doing a different report.” Susan assumed a local, school-related meaning and attributed her meaning to their actions. None of the students argued with her or explained their actions; they recognized that their meaning-making had been overridden in favor of Susan’s.

*What is meaningful?*

In addition to variations in what had meaning, Susan and Donna had varied constructs of what counted as meaningful text. Both teachers recognized that some work was meaningful and some was not, although what counted as meaningful largely depended upon the context of what work was being assigned. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, both Susan and Donna wanted to make sure they assigned
“meaningful” work during testing and not just work that was designed to keep students busy. When it became clear that her students were having difficulty with the grade-level worksheets, Susan instead assigned work that was review from previous years. Students also had their own definitions of what kinds of texts were meaningful, some of which depended upon how texts were used and referred to by the teachers.

Both teachers had varying constructs of what made student-created texts meaningful. A running theme throughout the year was that Susan was trying to teach her students to always write in complete sentences, restating the question in their answer. This theme was common in the curriculum as well. In the sample below, the event focused on a sentence being a complete thought, implying that thoughts are incomplete and not meaningful unless they followed a specific, pre-set structure.

![Figure 8: Excerpt from a prescribed curriculum grammar event](image)

In this text, and in Susan’s class, the correct answer was not acceptable unless it was phrased appropriately. The answer itself was deemed less meaningful if it was not in the correct format. For Donna, students’ work was meaningful even if they didn’t get the precisely correct answer. Effort and improvement made the work meaningful. “I do think
they can all do it by themselves. Maybe not correctly. And there’s a difference. I think they can all make an attempt to put an answer down to the best of their ability. I think they are all perfectly capable of making good guesses.” In an interview early in the year, Donna explained to me that she occasionally had students who barely completed their work at the beginning of the year, so for them, their goals were progressive. A few years ago, she had a student whose parents were not available to help him do his homework, so she made an agreement with him that as long as he demonstrated an effort to complete it, she would work with him the next day to finish it. “We worked from just bring it in with something on it, even if it's just a scribble, just show me you looked, to getting him to where he could do [it] at everybody else's skills.” Again, for Donna, it was the process that made texts meaningful, not necessarily the result, and meaningfulness was not static, but varied based on each student.

For students, despite the fact that they were surrounded by and interacted with texts practically every minute of the day, they saw only certain texts as “real” reading. In response to questions about what they read and wrote at school, each focal student responded in a very similar way. The worksheets in Donna’s class and the sentence and word work on white boards in Susan’s class did not factor into their definition of meaningful reading and writing. For them, these texts fell into the category of “schoolwork,” not reading and writing. Instead, most students described portfolio work, books, and favorite topics. Some students saw a difference between “school” texts and non-school reading, however. Lucy described “educational stuff” and Joe mentioned reports but also reading “random books.” Writing, on the other hand, was much less static than their reading definitions, and Lucy, Cory and Matthew all described math and
drawing pictures in the same description as story writing. For students, the
meaningfulness of text was based on the format and purpose of the text and how they
interacted with it. Understanding of what was meaningful, however, connected with how
the teachers referred to the texts and their work. Although students were frequently
directed to “read” directions and worksheets, extended reading activities were treated as
more meaningful reading by both Susan and Donna.

“Smart”

Both teachers had constructed meanings regarding who was “smart” and how one
gets to be that way and they frequently expressed these sentiments to their students. This
was a fluid concept that changed depending on the message teachers’ were trying to
convey at the time. Donna and Susan’s expectation of how students were to complete the
work assigned to them was most often expressed to the students in terms of their abilities
and expected development. There were three constructed meanings surrounding the
concept of being smart in these two classrooms: that everyone was smart; that the
purpose of school was for students to learn and become smart; and that some people were
more able to help because they were smart. These concepts were also strongly connected
to students’ age and gaining knowledge as one gets older.

The attitudes represented by the teachers demonstrated to their students who was
able to use texts appropriately and connected certain texts and uses of texts to students’
ages and grade levels. Students were expected to have the ability to appropriately use
certain kinds of texts because they were old enough; they learned from their teachers that
those who are “smart” are able to use texts and improve their skills. While most “smart”
references were from Donna’s class, Susan often reminded her students of why they were in school and their need to advance to third grade.

Everyone is smart

Donna carefully and deliberately constructed the notion that every classroom participant was smart and capable. When introducing new concepts, she said this in part to give them confidence that they could handle the new material. “This week we're going to be working on vowel sounds together. We're second graders, they decided we need to do more than that; yeah, cause we're smart; we can handle it.” This sense that everyone is able to use texts to the expected level was reinforced by Donna’s frequent comments that work was “easy.” It was common for Donna to say “this is really easy” as she went through the instructions for each worksheet. On occasion Donna changed the instructions and limited the requirements. “This one you don't even have to read, just find it; you don't have to write it, circle it. These should all be review from last week, last year.” This expressed to the students that reading and writing were what made the work difficult, and implied that if students found it difficult they were in some way different from the expected norm and not quite ready for second grade.

Based on this perspective, students who did not demonstrate the appropriate actions or abilities for their age were not “smart,” despite Donna’s emphasis that everyone could do the work. The following excerpt is from Donna’s class in January.

Donna: guys, I've been warning you and warning you, it does not take this long to get one paper done that you've been doing since September. There is no excuse. Nobody went to reading, nobody got tested and nobody was late. You had no good reason. It's not okay anymore. We're trying to get ready for third grade.
Anybody that doesn't have their folder work done by lunch will have to change their card. You don't have that much work in the morning... Everybody can do it. Now, I know you're not grown-ups, but you're not kindergarteners anymore.....I got to get you smart..... So, no more guys. You're going to act grown up. You're going to act smart, instead of sitting there saying I can't do it.

Jane: It's hard

Donna: well, if it's hard, then you're not ready for third grade....You should be the smartest kid at your table. Every one of you. Every one of you can do it. We're going to be changing a whole lot of cards if you don't… As of Friday, we are halfway through the year. You should be acting like third graders.

(Field notes, 01/12/2011)

In this vignette, Donna expressed to her students the belief that everyone was capable and there would be consequences if they did not achieve the expected requirements. The complaint that the work was hard was met with the argument that if it was hard they were lacking in some way. The implication was that if they were unable to complete the work they simply were not trying hard enough.

*The purpose of school is to get smart*

The notion that “everyone is smart” was contradicted by the emphasis that students needed to get smarter to advance, or that they were not ready for some of the work for which they should be ready. Susan told students that they were “at school to learn and get smart.” This theme was present in Susan’s class when she assigned review work. As was explained in the previous chapter, during testing week, both teachers struggled to find meaningful work that would occupy the class while they individually
tested students. Susan initially assigned worksheets from the curriculum, similar to those Donna assigned, but her students struggled with what to do because they were unfamiliar with this kind of text, so the following days she assigned spelling work from the first grade curriculum. “This is super easy. Just what we used to do in first grade for spelling homework.”

Okay, I need to continue with testing, so there are a few things you need to do.

Yesterday didn't go so well... So I got some first grade work for you. This should be easy-schmeasy. (Susan, 01/05/2011)

In telling students that these activities were for younger students, Susan was telling students that certain texts were associated with different grades and ages, and her students were not yet ready for second-grade materials.

In addition to bringing up first-grade texts as being easy but also something they needed to work on, Susan felt significant pressure to make sure her class was prepared for third grade, when they start taking standardized tests. “They’re not babies anymore and last year I felt like I was kind of force-feeding them the information…and we’re kind of phasing that out right now…this is an important year because next year they do the [state standardized test] and so I have to …try to get them to learn this information on their own.”

Donna also told her students that they were “old enough to read the directions” and once, that their work on handwriting was “really sloppy like preschoolers.” Both Donna and Susan were telling their classes that there was a connection between text use, age and becoming smart, rather than “smart” being an innate quality.
The frequent reminder that students needed to do the work to get ready for third grade carried the implication that lack of achievement may result in students not advancing, and in the vignette on the previous page, it may also result in punishment. As students advanced and got “smarter,” the expectations changed and students needed to keep up with the changing expectations. When students were writing their story maps, Donna told Peter, “We don't do pictures. We have not done pictures since October. We're in second grade. We use words.” Donna was telling Peter that pictures, in contrast to texts, were for younger children and therefore less valuable.

Students recognized that hard work resulted in achievement, which made a person smarter, as Derek said, “every time you read, you get smarter.” The expressed purpose of school was to become smart, or smarter, and students who did not advance according to their age were not engaged in the correct purpose of school. Students also expressed an understanding that there was a relationship between reading and writing and achievement. Smart people read and write and people read and write to become smarter.

Some people are smarter than others

Donna and Susan structured their classes according to what knowledge and skills they believed their students needed, but these decisions sometimes varied depending on the student and situation. Despite the fact that Donna often made comments like “see, I told you you guys were smart,” both she and Susan admitted to me that they knew they had students who were not able to achieve the same results as others, and in fact some who they believed just didn’t seem to be understanding what was going on at times. One reason Susan didn’t do much work with vocabulary was because she felt they weren’t ready for it yet, and instead worked to help them learn spelling words first. When some
students went for tutoring, they missed out on classroom time, so Susan “[tried] to account for when they’re gone, but a lot of them are the ones that if they are here they aren't really doing—they're not really participating in what we're doing anyways because I think they don't understand.” Again, the concept of “smart” related to both achievement and ability.

Donna saw these differences in students’ achievement as variations in ability and encouraged students to make guess on the off chance they were correct. She believed students had differing levels of ability and therefore had differing levels of success. However, for Donna, effort and improvement were acceptable levels of achievement, not simply getting the correct response. This recognition that students had different levels of ability is subtly expressed to the students.

I do think they can all do it by themselves. Maybe not correctly. And there’s a difference. I think they can all make an attempt to put an answer down to the best of their ability. I think they are all perfectly capable of making good guesses.

(Donna, 01/13/2011)

In addition to her decisions being based on a belief that students’ abilities were different, Donna’s statements also reflected to her students the belief that some of them were more capable than others, in direct contrast to her assertions that “everyone is smart.” During the event in which Donna read The Popcorn Book, one page involved students wanting information about popcorn and making the comment “I’ll look it up.” Both characters were illustrated wearing glasses and Donna made the comment, “smart guys with glasses,” perpetuating the cultural stereotype that intelligence and eyeglasses go hand in hand.
Classroom rules reinforced the notion that everyone was smart, but Donna’s statements contradicted that belief. Students were expected to ask classmates for help before asking an adult and they were expected to help one another when asked, representing the belief that all students were able to help. If they were still unable to get enough help, they were to ask Donna, which meant Donna often asked students “who did you ask” first. In one instance, Peter asked for help and Donna responded, “Who’d you ask? Just Brittany? Go ask her again. She might not have heard. She’s real smart.” Although Donna would refer to the whole group as being smart, not every student was individually referred to as smart, and some were placed as being smarter than others.

These divergent attitudes of being “smart” demonstrated to students that it was a fluid and variable definition, wholly dependent upon the teacher’s intent at the time. Sometimes all students were smart, or becoming smarter as they increased in knowledge. In other occasions, only some students were smart and able to provide assistance. In all of these meanings there was a symbiotic relationship between being smart and achieving: achievement made one smart and being smart caused one to achieve. Because of this, the implication was that students who were not achieving not smart, and that when “easy” work was hard, it was because they were not following the norm and did not deserve to be there. Frequent references to students’ work being for younger students and needing to prepare for third grade reinforced this.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that literacy events were prescribed in detail in the curriculum, actual events took on unique qualities that depended mostly on Donna and Susan’s classroom teaching practices. For both classrooms, the teacher had ultimate control in the
classroom, although Donna tried to encourage her students to question the meaning presented by outside texts and other participants. The process of learning was at times more highly prized than the eventual product, and students’ capability and sense of how smart they were was determined by the teachers’ perspectives and not their own. For Susan, meaning was strictly defined and controlled by texts and teachers. The purpose of work was to complete it, and uniformity of events, work and meaning are the general rule. Ultimately, meaning in these classrooms depended upon the teachers’ definitions and perspectives.

Expectations of Conformity

As is true in every situation, the classrooms did not exist in a bubble, but were strongly influenced by outside forces, most notable district mandates and a commercial curriculum. As was discussed previously, literacy was not only a local construct, but there were also broader, more global influences that drive the use and understanding of text in the classroom. Administrative rules and curriculum guidelines encroached upon literacy events.

Because the curriculum was mandated by the district and was a nationally recognized commercial curriculum, it represented a broader culture and power structure. Every time the curriculum was changed, the teachers felt this power. A few years previously, teachers were expected to follow a strictly scripted curriculum. “It wasn't that long ago that we all had to be on the same page at the same time saying the same thing on the same day.” Gradually, the administration relaxed the guidelines, although teachers were still officially supposed to follow the same schedule.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12} See Appendix L for a sample of the pacing guide
Within these curricular expectations were values to which teachers and students were expected to conform. Both teachers and their students were aware of the various power structures at play in their classrooms, including the authority of administrators and that of texts. There were also strong values toward conformity to specific attitudes regarding literacy and the normalization of certain lifestyles. Teachers, the curriculum and administrative expectations jockeyed for position in what was valuable and expected, and teachers went back and forth at times between reinforcing and challenging curricular values. These values related to who had the ultimate authority in the classrooms and what lifestyles, cultures and ethnicities were considered part of a “normal” life.

Power structures

Although Donna, Susan and the students were the only participants in the classrooms, there was a frequent awareness that there were outside power structures determining classroom literacy practices. This outside authority had profound effects on classroom activities and content, particularly in terms of testing and non-curricular activities.

Donna in particular was aware of the power struggles that existed between the classroom, school and district, in part because of her long experience with district changes. In her interactions with students, she frequently made comments to them about the fact that their work was mandated by outside forces, making these power struggles visible. Students felt powerless in many life situations, so Donna worked to make it evident that not only was she aware of this power struggle, but also tried to help students be pragmatic about the situation.
They do believe that everybody is telling them everything to do in every place…

So sometimes I will point that out to them that there are things that you just have to do because your boss makes you….there are just some things you have to do because somebody above you says you need to. (Donna, 10/11/2010)

Donna felt it was her duty to make the work relevant to students, because they often felt disconnected with texts and assigned work. When assignments came from anonymous, unseen forces, they sometimes did not believe there was any intrinsic value to completing the tasks.

And then when we do read the [mandated readings], we point out like, okay so what do you guys care? You know, why is this important to you? Why is it something that they're making us do? …Because a lot of them see it as a drudgery, as a job, as a chore and so we talk sometimes about, you know, why in creation would they make us sit here and read this stupid thing, and we come up with our own brainstorming ideas. So I try to do that as a way to make it more personal to them. (Donna, 10/11/2010)

Students did not always believe events were useful or even connected with one another. Texts and assignments were just what they were expected to do.

The messages of obedience to authority and conformity to others’ expectations were some of the most glaring examples of the hidden curriculum that was so pervasive within the classrooms. While students knew they were expected to obey their teachers, they were barely aware of the power struggles that existed between their teachers and administration. They accepted that their lives were rigidly controlled and did not question the messages given to them.
Although she was part of the authorities demonstrating these messages, Donna tried to make this hidden curriculum visible to her students. When special events or holidays came up, Donna made it clear to her students that higher authorities were deciding whether or not they would be able to proceed with their activities. When the teachers were planning a trip to nearby caverns, Donna emphasized to her students the need to behave so they would deserve the trip. “We must get ourselves in control because we are trying to talk the principal and other teachers into a special field trip…If we can't control ourselves, they won't let us go.” In this statement, Donna was positioning herself with the students, at the mercy of higher authority figures.

Classroom participants understood that there were outside authorities determining actions and events that occurred in their space. During Valentine’s Day, Donna usually encouraged students to make bags, bring in treats and exchange cards, but this year, because it took too much time, the principal told teachers that no parties would be allowed. Instead, Donna had students create bags and if they wanted to bring in treats, they could put the treats in the bags to take home. She jokingly said as long as it wasn’t a “party” and they kept it quiet, they were fine. Not only was Donna reinforcing the power the principal had over them, but she was demonstrating methods of subversion and resistance against that power and disrupting the hidden curriculum of obedience to authority.

Other than the administration limiting extra-curricular activities, the most obvious evidence of outside power structures encroaching on the classroom was the routine testing. At the beginning, middle and end of the year, the teachers were required to conduct reading tests on each student, and more periodically for lower achieving
students. In the past, teachers were encouraged to use running records (Clay, 2002), during which students read teacher-selected sections of leveled texts while teachers conduct a detailed analysis of their errors. Under the current system, however, students’ information was fed in to Palm Pilots, and when teachers conduct assessments, rather than have the freedom to choose the needed texts, they had to use the texts directed by the program. Both teachers expressed frustration with the strictures of the testing program. “I hate it. Absolutely hate it with a passion. Number one it takes far too much time away from the children, actual learning and doing things and being productive.” Donna in particular disliked it because of how tightly controlled the information was. “It's giving me a band-aid and not what is the injury here, and what can I do about this now.” The test results would not give teachers a detailed analysis of the results, but instead gave vague categories. These outside powers, controlling classroom literacy events and assessments left Donna and Susan feeling powerless.

**Text as authority**

In addition to people in positions of power having an authority over them, students learned that texts had authority over them, in terms of authority of information, authority over space, and authority over students’ behaviors. Because these texts generally originated in the curriculum, texts represented the outside authority. Texts in these classrooms were given a place of authority over participants, learning, events, actions and space. Susan and Donna emphasized in classroom events the text authority that superseded their local authority in the classroom, although Donna demonstrated to students that this authority was not absolute and could sometimes be challenged, again disrupting the hidden curriculum.
In teaching reading comprehension skills, Donna and Susan frequently told their students to look in the text for answers.

Lots of people were asking me about this paper. It's very easy. What do we do?...You read it. And how do you know the answers to the questions? Where do you find the answers?...In here. You always look back to what you read.

(Susan, 02/16/2011)

There were many texts in the classrooms, but in general, the outside texts that were brought in were given greater authority than the locally-generated texts. The word walls and other posters around the rooms were treated as valuable sources of information, but students were always referred back to the stories or books they had read for the ultimate answer. When reading nonfiction texts, students would sometimes access background knowledge to answer comprehension questions, actions which were discouraged because they were supposed to find the answers from the text. This was confusing to students because sometimes they were told to find the answers only from the text while in other occasions they are asked “higher order thinking” questions. In one event Donna assigned a worksheet where students answered questions about a figure of a table of contents. (see figure on the following page) One question asked “What is The History of the Guitar,” and the curriculum-provided response was “A chapter title,” but Donna told me it was a higher order thinking question, and she had told students the previous week what history was. She didn’t tell the students what kind of question it was, so quite a few were confused and struggled with coming up with the right answer.

Donna was reinforcing to her students that no matter what, texts have the authority of information, even when it didn’t always make sense. This was in direct
Figure 9: History of the guitar worksheet

contrast to other occasions, when she demonstrated that students had the right to challenge the meaning of texts.

In addition to text having the authority of information over students and sometimes teachers, texts in these classrooms were given authority over students’ actions. Donna and Susan demonstrated to students that texts had the power to direct both students’ and teachers’ actions and activities. Both teachers had job boards posted in their classroom with students’ responsibilities listed, such as line leader, supply manager and calendar. In Donna’s class, there were only 6 jobs, which were changed infrequently, but Susan had a job for each student and changed them weekly. Because of the prevalence of the job board in Susan’s class, students were frequently referred to it to know what their responsibilities were. In phrasing the directions as “what does the board say,” rather than “what job did I give you” or “what job did you choose for the week,” Susan was
distancing herself from the instruction and placing the text as the authority, rather than herself.

Susan and Donna made use of this concept during seatwork events, always reminding students to read the directions and follow them carefully. In addition, rather than tell students directions, Donna and Susan would on occasion write them down either on the chalkboard or the Smart Board, such as the following example.


(Field notes, 03/03/2011)

In part, this served a practical purpose, as students who forgot some of the directions could look at the board rather than continually asking the teacher, but this also served to again distance the teacher from the directions and set up the text as the authority figure in the classroom.

Both teachers demonstrated that they were not immune to the authority of text over their own lives, and the outside authority those texts represented. The curriculum was designed for teachers to follow activities carefully, even directing their precise words (see figure on the following page).

In the example above, the instructions are specific in the actions teachers were to take and in the words they were to say. In going so far as to give what students’ answers should be, which should be quite obvious to trained educators, the text was positioned as the education authority over the teachers. Because of the exactness of the lessons, both Susan and Donna found it necessary to keep their lesson books with them during the instructional time so they could refer to
them. These books were an integral part of instruction, and when transitioning from one event to another, Donna and Susan would refer to the text, sometimes asking out loud, “what does it say we should do next.” Susan more precisely followed the curriculum, and when students would ask why they had to do a particular activity, she would sometimes respond “Because it says so.” Again, Susan was placing the text as the authority above her. Students recognized that the texts were assigned to the teachers by higher powers and that their teachers, like themselves, were obligated to use whatever texts outside authority figures chose.

Donna tried to demonstrate to her students that this authority was not absolute and could sometimes be overridden. As was described previously, Donna frequently changed and altered the curriculum, and during instructional time, she sometimes made this visible to students. Sitting in her chair with her book, she would flip through, commenting on activities saying “I don’t want to do that, it’s boring. No, I don’t want to do that one.”
This gave the implication that Donna was at that moment rejecting activities, although in reality she had a set plan for the day. Rather, Donna was making explicit to her students that she had some freedom to choose and reject what the text said sometimes.

Although texts were given authority of students’ actions in work, Donna demonstrated that she had the authority to alter textual authority, in changing the directions of worksheets to make things simpler for students at times. Some worksheets confused students with unfamiliar font types, so when going over them Donna altered the text. Even students recognized that this authority could be questioned when they noticed errors in worksheets, both grammatical errors and content errors. At the beginning of the year, this confused students more but gradually, several students began commenting on errors they found. In the following event, Donna and her students were going over a proofreading paper, which Donna had projected on the wall with the document camera.

Donna: That I is a capital letter on a computer. They don't tell you that, but if you want you can put the extra lines in

A few minutes later, students commented on Donna changing something that wasn’t an error.

Donna: I know, that's how the computer does it. I'm fixing it because you guys don't like it. (Field notes, 10/18/2010)

In this event, Donna demonstrated to her students that text could be changed based not only on her wishes, but on their own. She changed the text because they “didn’t like it.” Donna was showing her students they too, had authority over changing texts. Ultimately, however, this alteration was superficial. Donna and her students were not changing the format or meaning of the text.
Part of text having authority over students is the concept that texts had authority over spaces. In order to maintain order over space, Donna and Susan employed the use of labels in their classrooms. Students’ desks, books, supplies and book boxes were labeled with their names on them. These labels represented a division of resources and space and showed who was responsible for these resources and the spaces. In Susan’s class, division of resources was fairly straight-forward, because students had their own desks and kept their books and supplies in their own desks. Because Donna used tables in her class, such separations were not possible; books had no names in them and were kept on shelves. Students’ writing supplies were kept in personal pencil boxes in baskets on their tables and their book boxes were kept on a separate shelf. When the work for the day was passed out, each student had a labeled work folder, which they turned in at the end of the day. Each student’s seat was labeled with his or her name on the table, creating a clear division of space where none existed before.

In both classes, it became quite clear to students that labels were useful for not only identifying one’s own belongings and space, but also for identifying who did not take care of their belongings and therefore who did not follow directions. This use of text to divide up possessions and space again demonstrated the authority texts have over students’ lives.

When texts were demonstrated as having authority over both students and teachers, Donna and Susan both referred to this authority as “they.” Presenting texts as written by this anonymous “they” separated texts from the classroom participants and placed the authority as outside the classroom. Frequently teachers used the same phrasing when they referred to outside authorities making decisions that affected the classroom.
One day, Joe asked me “who are they? Why do people always say ‘they’?” Although using the term “they” was a convenient term when the author is anonymous, it was also a method for placing the text as the authority in the classroom, above both teacher and student.

In Donna and Susan’s classrooms, texts were not just objects students could learn to read, but instead they were positioned as authorities over the students and even sometimes as over the teachers. Because most texts came from outside the classroom, they were closely connected to the outside authorities and power structures that were felt in the classrooms.

*Universality of literacy*

Because the curriculum was often used to guide the events, texts and content in classrooms, the curriculum definition of literacy was of particular interest and influence. Literacy learning in the curriculum was presented as passive, effortless and uniform. Despite their protestations, Donna and Susan’s speech and actions generally confirmed the implication that literacy was the same everywhere and for everyone.

Although the curriculum did not specifically define what literacy was, a definition could be inferred. Activities were broken up under specific categories, as if literacy was a compilation of skills and concepts. Spelling, grammar, writing, fluency, comprehension were all divided up into distinct events and texts. Although Susan’s definition most closely resembled the curricular definition, she still felt the curriculum was somewhat lacking. “There's phonics in there, there's writing, there's grammar there's reading and basically we are supposed to just go from this book and do what it says in the book and miraculously your child will be able to read if we do all this.” When she said this, Susan
laughed, because she did not think there was “any one way to teach every single child.” Susan’s comment that “miraculously” children would be able to read if the curriculum was used implied a sense of passivity in both the teaching and learning.

The curriculum represented this “one way to teach every single child” notion in an attitude of conformity. Rather than conform to participants’ needs, the curriculum was designed to be set and rigid, with students and teachers needing to conform to the values and expectations represented. The only distinction between students in the curriculum was in ability groups for reading time. Students were to be divided into three groups according to their perceived ability: below-level, on-level and advanced. Although these groups were designed to address students’ needs more precisely, they served to pigeonhole students instead. According to Donna,

They have the three levels supposedly but they're not low enough and they're not high enough. It hits the middle kids real good. It hits the low of the middle and it hits the high of the middle. It doesn't hit the truly high kids and it doesn't hit the truly low kids. The low kids cannot read the low books. They're not low enough.

(Donna, 10/11/2010)

Students were all expected to fit into one of these groups, regardless of their achievement. Students who were reading books at higher grade levels were all grouped together in the advanced group, no matter what level books they were reading. Lucy, for example, tested at level Q, upper third grade, at the beginning of second grade and was in the same reading group as students reading a few months ahead of where they were expected to be. Conversely, Keisha was barely reading at level B, kindergarten level, when she entered Donna’s class in October. Although she struggled with reading almost
all texts given to her, she was grouped with students who struggled only slightly with provided texts. Grouping students by achievement while their achievement was so far apart even within groups demonstrated to students that their differences were not to be addressed or even acknowledged. Because these were the only times students were not taught as a whole class, conformity was the norm.

For the most part, all students were to do the same work in their respective classes in the curriculum and both teachers reinforced this expectation. As described in the previous chapter, students were all given the same amount of work to do and were expected to complete it in an allotted amount of time. Donna and Susan’s emphasis on scheduling and completing work in the allotted time had a homogenizing effect. Although Donna gave her students the freedom to choose in what order they completed their work, assigned texts in both classrooms were homogenizing. One glaring example of this was during the morning work events.

Although morning work events were the time when students came in at various points and got started for the day, they were expected to complete the work no matter what time they entered the classroom. Both Susan and Donna often made comments about students having had sufficient time to finish, especially to students who had entered the classroom earlier. Those who didn’t finish were expected to find time to complete the work later in the day. Susan would tell her students, “Okay, if you are not finished with your paper, where should you put it...Put it in your yellow folder and finish it when you have time.” Sometimes students were punished for not completing their work in time,

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13 The only exception to this was when students went to tutoring. If they were gone for most of an event, they were generally not expected to complete the assigned work. When Donna kept students in for recess for not completing their work, the exception was if they had been called out for tutoring or some other reason. Sometimes, however, both teachers declared there had been sufficient time for tutoring students to complete their work.
especially if Donna believed they had not been working hard enough. When Donna was focusing on students being more detailed in describing the setting of a story in January, she told the students, “anybody who doesn't have their book report done when I say it's time to go to the rug has to change your card. You've had 18 minutes to get this done.” Most of the time Donna’s students were expected to finish it as their seatwork. When Susan told her students, “Okay, put your name on your paper even if you're not done. We're moving on. Give it to your supply manager,” she was telling them that following the schedule and keeping up with everyone was more important than making sure the work was completed correctly, or even completed at all.

Despite the emphasis that all students had different abilities and the sorting of students into groups, there was a sense that if students did what was expected they would succeed, based on the presumption that all students had the same capabilities, skills and necessary knowledge. Both Donna and Susan told students that activities should be easy and that if they had behaved as expected, they would be able to understand the texts and complete tasks appropriately. In the example below, Donna assigned a worksheet students had already done but struggled with.

You shouldn't have had any problem with these if you were paying attention yesterday…So I just told you the answer. You should all get this right and you should all get this done…You guys actually did this before. But you had such a hard time with it you're going to do it again. But this time you're not going to ask me. You have to be able to do this.  

(Donna, 02/15/2011)

Although the students had failed to understand the text the first time, Donna announced that this time she would not be helping them. The burden was placed upon the student to
meet the expectations of the teachers and the text. In telling students that if they had paid attention, they should be able to complete the task, Donna was making explicit to her students the expectation of uniformity and conformity to classroom and curriculum expectations.

*Normalization of specific lifestyles*

Both the curriculum and teachers expressed certain expectations of what children should know and how their lives should be that were expressed through the curriculum and teachers’ speech. The stories and images in the curricular texts represented expectations of what students’ lives were expected to look like.

Throughout the curriculum were “realistic fiction” stories that featured children and their families. In representing people’s lives in stories, the curriculum was representing what was considered a normal lifestyle. Characters were mostly from middle-class families, with parents who were involved in children’s lives and the families lived in nice, clean neighborhoods. I have chosen two stories from the StoryTown book as typical examples of how the curriculum presented a normalization of certain lifestyles. Both stories were from trade books and were not written solely for the curriculum, but their inclusion in the text represented an attempt at normalizing certain values.

Early in the year, students read a story called *Big, Bushy Mustache*, by Gary Soto which featured a Latino child who was unhappy because people told him he looked like his mother, when he wanted to look like his father. At school the teacher passed out props for a Cinco de Mayo celebration and Ricky chose a bushy mustache that resembled his father’s. Rather than put it away like his teacher said, he chose to wear it home, enjoying the feel of appearing older and more masculine. When it got lost on his way home, he
was reluctant to tell his father for fear of getting in trouble. When he finally confessed, his father was understanding and in the morning appeared at breakfast, having shaved off his mustache to make for his son to take in so he wouldn’t get in trouble.

The second story, *Jamaica Louise James*, by Amy Hest involved a young Black girl who lived in Brooklyn with her mother and grandmother, who worked at a subway station. When Jamaica Louise was given a set of paints for her birthday, she began to paint portraits of her family and the people who regularly pass through the station. On her grandmother’s birthday, Jamaica Louise and her mother hung the portraits in the subway, cheering up her grandmother and making the subway passengers feel more like a community.

Both stories were quite different but represented particular versions of typical life. In *Big, Bushy Mustache*, Ricky lived in a clean, single-home neighborhood and was able to walk home safely. His mother was at home when he arrived, apparently as a stay-at-home mom. His father came home for dinner and when Ricky confessed to what he’d done, rather than punish him, his father made a personal sacrifice so he wouldn’t get in trouble with his teacher. Although some students came from middle-class families, most children lived in working-class and lower-class homes. Several of Donna and Susan’s students over the years had spent time in homeless shelters, sometimes even having to change schools because the shelters were too far away. Jamaica Louise James’ home was urban, but still comfortable and taken care of. Poverty was not shown in the curricular texts and these different lifestyles were evident to some students. When asked which

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14 One exception to this was *A chair for my mother*, by Vera B. Williams, in which the family lost their possessions in a fire and had to save money to purchase a comfortable chair for the narrator’s hard-working mother. The poverty in this story, however, was temporary and caused by a fire, rather than the long-term poverty many students experienced.
stories or characters were most like them, focal students did not connect to characters’ families or homes; any similarities were found in characters’ hobbies.

One aspect of some stories might have been familiar to the students. In contrast to *Big Bushy Mustache*, which was more suburban and featured both parents, Jamaica Louise James lived only with her mother and grandmother in Brooklyn. Living with one parent or extended family in an urban setting was quite familiar to many students, but the “single-parent” urban life was in stark contrast to the suburban “both parent” life and not as frequent in the texts.

Despite the seemingly varied lifestyles represented in some of the stories, there was a set pattern in them; most stories with both parents took place in suburban houses while stories with single parents took place in urban areas. A third story, titled “At play: Long ago and today,” compared lifestyles of the past, mostly around the beginning of the 20th century, and present day, presented an even more unified version of both past and present. The nonfiction story went through different facets of life, including Playing Sports, Enjoying the Park, Games, Reading, Family Vacations and Special Events. Each section had photographs and short descriptions comparing past and present. These versions of both past and present American life normalized middle-class life more than any story in the curriculum. The story painted a rosy picture of life in early 20th century America, portraying families as close-knit, taking vacations together, spending time in the park and children playing ball in the street. What it ignored was the poverty and uncertainty that existed for many, particularly children who were still forced to work alongside adults. Present-day life was similarly rosy, with families taking vacations
together with lots of books and electronic games in the homes. For Donna and Susan’s students, these families’ lives could seem quite foreign.

The teachers supported the perspective in the curriculum that students’ lives should have contained certain experiences. When the teachers told students there were things they “should” know, they were not only telling children about what they should have learned in school already; Donna and Susan were also telling their students that there were certain funds of knowledge they should already have. Early in the year, Donna assigned poetry centers in which students read nursery rhymes and highlighted words according to grammatical or spelling patterns. Despite the fact that Donna knew some of her students’ families did not own many books, when introducing these poems, it was common for Donna to say “you should know these.” This statement of what they “should” know emphasized to the students what was expected of them and that there were certain texts that were expected to be typically known.

The stories provided in the curriculum demonstrated to children, like the nursery rhymes in Donna’s poetry center, that there were certain “shoulds” in their lives. There were texts they should have been familiar with and there were families and lifestyles that were more typically expected.

“Others”

In contrast to the normalized lifestyles presented in the texts, some cultures were represented, not as diverse parts of a multi-faceted group of people, but rather as “other” cultures, different from the norm. Both Donna and Susan reinforced the implication that although some groups were accepted as part of their larger culture, there were some groups who were separate.
Although Latino and Black characters were represented in normalizing stories, American Indians were firmly in the “other” category. During November, when Thanksgiving was a main topic of literacy and social studies events, Donna and Susan talked about American Indians in comparison to the students’ and teachers’ heritage. In the example below, Susan was introducing an American Indian folktale to her students and talking about the genre. In referring to American Indians, there was a significant we/they standpoint.

What group of people wrote this story…Something American. Blank American…Native Americans. We used to call them Indians, but we don't call them Indians anymore. Indians are from India…[Susan told how the Native Americans were here first and “we” didn't know where they were from first.] (Susan, 10/19/2010)

When discussing the origins of the story, Susan spoke with a distinctly European mindset, representing American Indians in contrast to the “we” group. In another event discussing the European settling of America, Susan wanted students to compare and contrast Americans’ present lives and those of the early European settlers. Some of her students’ responses referred to bows and arrows, to which Susan said, “Well, that was more Native Americans and we are trying to compare ourselves to early Americans.”

In describing American Indians in contrast to “we” and “Americans,” Susan’s implication was that American Indians were not real Americans, and instead belonged in the “other” category.\footnote{Although it is important to note that many American Indian tribes consider themselves separate from Americans both culturally and politically, American Indian histories, languages and people have significantly intermingled with other American cultures and are not easily separated.}

There did seem to be an attempt in the curriculum to maintain a diverse set of characters, rather than have most characters being white, and there was an obvious
attempt to include diverse names, with a wide variety of names from other cultures, with the exclusion of American Indian names. The single American Indian name was Cree, to which Susan commented after reading it, “Cree trains dogs. Her name is Cree; that's an unusual name, isn't it,” maintaining the “other” category for American Indians.

Some of the inclusion of “other” perspectives by Susan and Donna was a deliberate decision on their parts. One of the reasons they made a point to include cultures with which students were unfamiliar was because they saw their students as living somewhat limited lives. One of the most obvious ways Donna and Susan did this was during Black History Month, in February. Beginning around Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, and continuing throughout February, both teachers supplemented the reading and social studies curricula with texts and activities about slavery, the Underground Railroad and the civil rights movement. Susan explained to me that she made an effort to add to the curriculum because her students, “even my African-American ones” were unaware of what slavery was or the civil rights movement.

Both teachers feel the curriculum, which included a biography of George Washington Carver and a few short small group books about Black inventors, was significantly lacking. Susan assigned several activities about Harriet Tubman and once, the students read short a “then and now” comparison of life before and after the civil rights movement. Each student in Donna’s class chose a famous Black person and wrote a biography about him or her, which was posted in the hall. In addition, after talking about the way they were trying to include outside texts, I loaned both teachers my copy of *Martin’s Big Words*, by Doreen Rappaport, a picture book biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.
When teaching students about slavery and the civil rights movement, Susan and Donna were not only adding to, but were also changing the message being passed on by the curriculum. Although the biography of George Washington Carver referred to his struggles with succeeding as a Black man in the late 19th century, it was presented as a passive problem. The text described Carver as leaving home because he had learned all he could at his first school, but only subtly implied that the other local school was for whites only. In the example below, Derek said Carver left his first school because it was only for white people, which Susan took to mean that he wasn’t paying attention.

Susan: okay, why did George Washington Carver leave his first school?
Derek: cause it was only for White people
Susan: no, good guess… You got to pay attention…it's on page 127…very good.
Because he learned all that school could teach him. (Field notes, 20/08/2011)

In the passage describing Carver’s decision to go to a school several miles away, the text said “the closest school for African Americans was many miles away.” Rather than just guessing, as Susan seemed to think Derek was doing, he was reading into the text and making assumptions about what the text was saying. In addition the phrase “not many African-Americans went to college in the 1890s” implied the Black population simply chose not to attend college at that time.

In including such a subtle representation of the struggle for equal rights throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, problems were sanitized and ignored larger societal difficulties. In fact, in making the implication that the Black population chose not to attend college doesn’t simply ignore their plight; it changes the story entirely, and sets them up against more successful White people. Both Donna and Susan chose to combat
these messages by adding to the curriculum and making the civil rights movement not about Black versus White, but about right versus wrong, removing the “other” category.

Conclusion

The choices made by curriculum writers and district administrators who chose the curriculum demonstrated what they valued and what values they wanted children and teachers to subscribe to. Because the values from an outside power group were represented in the mandated curriculum, they wielded a great deal of influence over the classroom participants. The overall expectation was that students would conform to the values represented in the curriculum, and teachers either reinforced these values or brought their own values for students to conform to. Although the teachers occasionally were able to override the curriculum, these choices were superficial, indicating that they, along with their students, were expected to cede authority to the curriculum.

Student Responsibility

In recognizing the social nature of literacy, Donna and Susan expressed values that students had a great deal of personal responsibility in the classrooms, both to themselves and to one another and the classroom practices they crafted demonstrated these expectations to their students. Donna and Susan used their definitions of literacy to create and structure classroom events, but as classroom participants, the students also had a key role in the construction of classroom literacy practices. Although students recognized that teachers had authority in the classroom, their own expectations of text use and their social world were noticeable and sometimes in conflict with their teachers’ expectations. The literacy practices in Donna and Susan’s classrooms were at the same time treated as both individual and social. Even the individualized events, however, were
socially negotiated. Students were responsible for their individual achievement but everything took place in a social sphere and texts were negotiated within social interactions.

Susan and Donna emphasized to their students that, they had certain responsibilities in the classroom. Most of these responsibilities related to personal achievement, such as making sure they do their own work and not getting themselves into trouble, but students also had a responsibility to fellow classmates. Students learned that they were responsible for behaving in a way that made other people’s lives better and for setting a good example for classmates. In addition, Donna expressed to her students that they were responsible for helping one another understand and complete their work. Students recognized this and often felt it was their responsibility to help one another, both in schoolwork and in social situations.

Personal responsibility

Students’ primary responsibility was to do their own work and in both classrooms, work was the main purpose of school and superseded all other activities. Above all else, students were expected to complete assigned texts and typically do it on an independent basis. Donna frequently reminded students that there was always work to do and when they finished with assigned work for the day, they were do find something else to do, usually reading books or writing in their writers’ workshop folders.

When you are done with your center, what are you supposed to do? Go to the next center. When you're done with all the centers, start your seatwork, and then writing or reading, until I tell you the next thing to do. What do you always do when you're done? ...writing or reading. (Donna, 09/30/2010)
Donna was expressing the belief that students were to be always working and it was their responsibility to stay on task. This was in contrast to Susan’s classroom structure, in which it was the teacher’s responsibility to give each student the next task, and students’ main responsibility was to follow the teacher’s directions at all times.

In order to encourage her students to work harder, Susan frequently informed them that their job was to be at school and learn. In the following quote, Susan told her students that they had not achieved well on their report cards because they had not worked hard enough and done their jobs.

All right, so this is the beginning of the second grading period. Actually last week was the first week. Report cards will go home on Wednesday. Your report cards were not very good this quarter. [because the students did not listen, didn't do their work]. Your job is to come to school and learn. That is your only job here at school. (Susan, 11/08/2010)

In telling students these things, Donna and Susan were telling them that school did not need to be fun and that children had jobs just like adults. The message was that success and failure were their responsibility and whether or not they succeeded or failed was due solely as a result of their own work.

The teachers were expressing to their students that their job was to learn, and if they had not learned, they had failed in doing their jobs. Although in interviews she said she struggled with how to teach to each students’ individual needs, Susan’s perspective in the classroom was that if students failed to learn and succeed, they had not tried hard enough or had played around too much. Donna’s attitude was also somewhat conflicted. In an interview, she said if her students hadn’t learned it was up to her to change her tactics. “If
they're not getting it, it's because I'm not teaching it.” In class, however, most of the time students were told that if they hadn’t completed their work appropriately in that day’s events, it was because they hadn’t worked hard enough\textsuperscript{16}.

As part of their personal responsibility in the classroom, students were expected to use texts in specific ways. In Donna’s class, they were responsible for finishing several pieces of work within an allotted amount of time, deciding on their own in what order to complete them. In Susan’s class, the whole group frequently corrected work together and students were responsible for correcting their own papers, including writing the correct answer and giving themselves a good score once they had filled in all the answers. There were disparate values in the two classrooms: while in Donna’s class, students had a great deal of personal responsibility in managing their own work, Susan’s students were expected to complete texts one at a time, when directed.

\textit{Responsibility to others}

This concept of personal responsibility to complete individual texts was a bit of an anachronism in the classrooms, because students were not isolated and did not always complete texts independently. Students existed in the classroom with other students who were often engaged with similar texts and with teachers who assigned the texts. Their lives were intertwined with others’ and how they used and viewed texts changed based on their interactions with other classroom participants.

In addition to taking care of their own learning, there was a prevailing message that students also had a responsibility to help others learn and succeed. When classmates

\textsuperscript{16} It is possible that both Donna and Susan used this tactic because they were confident their students were able to complete the work and were trying to give them confidence and maintain classroom order, because the students were so young and easily distracted. Whatever their intent, however, the message the students got was the same.
were confused or upset, they stepped in to comfort or help them. While Donna reinforced and for the most part encouraged this message of social responsibility, Susan discouraged it. Donna’s rationale was that “coming from those different backgrounds they may not listen to adults very well. Or believe ’em.” The rule in Donna’s class was that students were required to ask other classmates for help before asking an adult (either Donna, me, or an afternoon volunteer), thereby encouraging them to see one another as sources of knowledge and freeing her up to help students who needed more attention. Students recognized that while they had the responsibility to complete their own texts, they were not interacting with these texts in several isolated events, but instead were a part of a larger, more communal literacy event. Answers were shared (and sometimes copied), but for the most part students were expected to help their classmates figure out the answer on their own. Later in the year, this changed, as Donna began to discourage students from asking for help in order to encourage them to be more independent and prepare for third grade. The message to her students was that although they were responsible to help others work, ultimately, their ultimate responsibility was to themselves their ability to complete their own work independently.

In keeping with the literacy practices of her class, Susan maintained an individualized classroom. Despite the fact that students were all doing the same work at the same time, they were treated as if they were doing it all separately. Students helped one another on occasion, but this went against Susan’s no-talking rule. Joy, in particular, frequently turned around in her seat or got up to help classmates, even ones who were higher achieving than she was. Susan admitted to inconsistency in her class, because although she told me they could help one another, most of the time she insisted work be
independent. Because students were expected to use texts independently, the implication was that they should be competent enough to use the text adequately. This attitude reinforced the attitude that if students could not do the work assigned to them, they did not deserve to be there.

Students struggled with negotiating their beliefs within these social worlds in which the teachers’ values held sway. They felt a strong social connection with their classmates that was manifested in various ways. Recognizing that their classmates were at times confused by texts and struggled to know how to use them, students frequently tried to help one another, even furtively, when helping one another was discouraged. One of their biggest struggles was knowing how to help someone in what was considered an acceptable way. Frequently while I walked around helping students in Donna’s class, I would hear students telling one another the answers or even copying directly from others’ papers. Both Donna and I discouraged this, by reminding them that “telling is not helping.” Some students, Peter and Ben in particular resisted independent work and tried to convince me and their classmates to do the work for them.

At times students struggled with moving from knowing the definition of “help” to understanding how to put that definition in action. When completing their work, they walked a fine line between working together and giving away the answer. They enjoyed working together and students in Donna’s class frequently chose worksheets their tablemates were also working on, which Donna and I both encouraged. Brittany and Keisha, for instance, frequently worked together, in part because they were friends and Brittany enjoyed helping Keisha complete texts that she struggled to complete independently.
Students in Susan’s class were also drawn to help one another, but were discouraged from doing so, in part because students were expected to complete the work independently but also because of the implication that it was Susan’s responsibility to take care of the students and social interaction was less important than work. Below is an example of one occasion in which Matthew felt the need to comfort a classmate and was scolded for his effort. On this occasion, Jasmine, who had a history of becoming quite emotional, with outbursts of pouting, anger or tears, had spent several minutes delaying her work. After she had started, she put her head on her desk and began to whimper. Matthew, sitting in front of her, turned around and patted her arm, saying, “It’s okay.”

Susan to Matthew: turn around. Leave her alone. Why is she crying?...Well, that's her choice.

Matthew: I'm just trying to help her.

Susan: well, she doesn't need help. She needs to do this on her own.

(Field notes, 03/24/2011)

Susan’s message to Matthew and the rest of her class was that personal work must come before any social interactions. Conversely, although Donna would call students out for talking about non-work related topics, as long as they were still getting their work done, students were allowed to help one another and talk. When Donna scolded Joe for talking to Ben, she apologized after he told her they were talking about school. “Oh, are you talking to him about lunch...Okay, sorry.”

When permitted, students enjoyed working together in literacy events, in part because they had someone to help them, but also so they could share texts with someone. Students saw text as something to be shared and frequently initiated shared events, both
with fellow classmates and adults. Numerous times students would share with Susan and Donna, or sometimes me, pictures or book titles that they found interesting or that related to a classroom subject. Matthew, Joe and Cory all sat near me much of the time (Joe and Cory tended to go back and forth at the back isolated desk in Donna’s room) and frequently began conversations about books they were reading or stories they had written. Students who worked by themselves—especially during center work—felt isolated did not enjoy the work as much. One day, Brittany ended up being the only person sitting at her table because her other tablemates were at small group or tutoring, and she told me, “I’m the only one here and it’s sad.” Students depended on social interaction and from their perspective it went hand-in-hand with interaction with text.

Donna and Susan both capitalized on the fact that students placed high value on sharing texts together. In December, when students were learning letter writing, Donna gave her students the assignment to write letters to Santa’s elves (fifth-grade students), asking questions about life with Santa Claus. Students were very excited they day they received personalized responses from the “elves.” Most students walked around the room and stood in groups sharing their letters with me, Donna and one another.

One of the reasons students enjoyed center work, aside from the variety of activities, was that they had the opportunity to work with and talk with one another, sharing what they had done and learning from one another. Mostly at the beginning of the year, Susan assigned paired word sorting games. Knowing how important social interaction was in literacy events, Donna and Susan used the removal from social situations as punishment. During rug time, both teachers sent students to sit at their seats when they misbehaved and moved students’ desks away from everyone else if they
continued to misbehave during seat time. Susan also threatened to separate partners if they did not do their work according to directions. “If I think you’re not listening to me, you’re not going to have a partner. You’re going to be doing this all by yourself.”

Although to their students interaction with text was naturally social, by threatening removal from social settings, Donna and Susan were demonstrating their beliefs that social interaction and interaction with text were two separate concepts.

Moral responsibility

Responsibility for others was not limited solely to helping students learn. Donna and Susan used literacy events to teach students that they were also responsible for one another’s’ behavior and for being an example to others. When characters encountered difficulties in the stories they read as a class, Donna and Susan would connect the character’s feelings to students’ and ask them what should be done, not only talking about decision-making but also putting a moral spin on it. When discussing a story in which the main character, Gus, was frustrated over not learning how to ride his bike, and one of the vocabulary words for the week was defeated. When discussing the meaning, Donna told her students, “You can also defeat somebody’s feelings. How can you make somebody feel defeated? Gus in our story yesterday felt defeated.” Although the story did not relate to one person causing another to feel defeated, Donna used the occasion do discuss moral behavior. Curricular stories were used to teach students expected moral behaviors and social responsibilities, such as doing the right thing, being unselfish and doing one’s own work.

Story characters were not the only ones used as examples of correct behavior. It was common for Donna and Susan to use students as examples of how to behave or not
to behave. Students’ reading behaviors were pointed out to their classmates as good examples for them to follow. Both teachers called out students’ good behaviors to others to subtly demonstrate what they consider to be acceptable behavioral practices. During seatwork one day, Joe brought Donna his work and complimented him about his neat handwriting. “Wonderful writing, wow! That’s the nicest, neatest handwriting I’ve seen all year. From anyone. High five.” Compliments on students’ good work were not out of the ordinary, but this comment was deliberately said loud enough for the entire class to hear.

Sometimes the teachers, particularly Susan, would make subtle references to students who were not following directions. These statements were not the same as when they would call out students in direct commands to obey, but were more veiled and directed at other students. While on the rug one day, Susan called for her students to pass materials forward, and one student was unsure what to do because the student in front of her was playing around and not taking the materials. Susan’s comment to her was, “You do what you need to do. Obviously he’s not choosing to follow the rules.” With statements like this, Susan was using one student’s misbehavior do indicate to the rest of her students that this was not acceptable behavior. In these events, the teachers were drawing a connection between reading behaviors and obedience and teaching students that those who obey are likely to be rewarded, either verbally or with more tangible means.

**Conclusion**

Literacy practices were created out of social interactions, formed and negotiated by the participants of each classroom. These negotiations were not equal, however, as the
teachers’ definitions tended to hold sway. Donna and Susan both believed students had a responsibility to themselves that superseded all other responsibilities and interactions. Texts in Donna’s class could be shared and worked over together, but only to a point. For Susan, work was almost always to be individualized, which went against her students’ preferred practices of sharing texts and working socially to understand them. Although both teachers used students’ sense of social connection and responsibility to teach ethical and appropriate reading behaviors, there was still a conflict between what students’ valued and teachers. Both teachers frequently used students’ behavior as examples of both good and bad behavior for the rest of the class. Sometimes these examples related to moral behavior, while other times it related to appropriate reading and writing practices. In comparing students to each other, Donna and Susan were using their students as real-life demonstrations of how to be a “good” person.

The difference between Donna and Susan’s was that in Donna’s class, students had an acknowledged and expected responsibility to help one another understand and complete assigned texts. The ultimate goal was for students to be able to work with the texts independently, but this was a progressive goal and students were expected to reach that goal with the help of others. Students in Susan’s class, however, had a responsibility to complete only their own work and the message was that independent work was most valued.

These responsibilities students had in the classroom were sometimes difficult to negotiate, as they varied depending on the event and intention of the teacher. Students’ priorities leaned toward working with and helping others, but teachers and the curriculum
demonstrated that although students should work to make others’ lives better, they were ultimately responsible for taking care of themselves.

Purposes and Structures of Alphabetic Texts

When I first entered the classrooms I was instantly struck by the ubiquitousness of text. Print was everywhere, but not all texts were equally used or valued. To both teachers and students, print was a vital part of classroom life, but students learned that some texts were more important than others and value and meaning largely depended upon the teachers’ purposes.

This section focuses on the multiple nature of literacy in the classrooms, specifically on the multiple nature of the texts. Texts in these classrooms existed in multiple forms and were used for a variety of purposes. Every kind of text had different purposes and structures, and Donna and Susan demonstrated to the students in their classrooms that texts and reading were valuable and useful in set contexts.

*Rigidity of texts*

A major focus of the curriculum was to teach students the structure and features of various genres, with the primary focus being on fiction stories. The reason Donna assigned a number of story maps was in order to help students learn to identify the main features of a story, such as characters, setting, beginning, middle and end. These features were taught as set and rigid and the curriculum and both teachers emphasized the fact that every story must have a beginning, middle and an end. As Donna explained to her students one day,

> When I read a story, it will have a beginning, middle and an end. That's the plot.

At the beginning of the story, they always tell us who the characters are and
where it is but they also tell us something else...the problem. When we read "Grandpa and Gus" what was the problem...How did he fix it? Okay, now there was a main idea. Sometimes there's a moral. What was the main idea of the story?...So every single story has a plot, setting, characters and every story has a main idea. Every story has to have it.  

(Donna, 10/18/2010)

The message that every story must have these elements and would be constructed in this way implied a rigidity to story formats, and if stories did not follow this format, they were not complete.

Fiction texts in these settings were attributed with specific structures that students were expected to identify and follow. These stories were carefully segmented into three sections, despite the fact that stories had fluid plots that were difficult to separate into precise sections. For example, the story *Annie’s Gifts* was separated into a beginning, middle and end (see below), despite the fact that there were more than three distinct portions of the story. At times, I struggled to help students identify precisely what should be included in the beginning and end of the stories, because my interpretation of major plot points sometimes differed from the teachers’ and curriculum. In making stories fit a set mold, the message in both the curriculum and teachers’ instruction was that there was little ambiguity or room for questioning texts and interpretations.

This rigidity carried over in the expressed purposes for writing and reading texts. The purpose of reading fiction stories was described as for entertainment. The figure below, on the right, is from the StoryTown book, which presents various genres and the purposes for writing them. Both Donna and Susan presented an assumption that students would not read the stories if they were not entertained. The message was also that all
fiction stories would be entertaining, without question. These purposes also imply writing must be for some form of communication with others, although students often wrote stories to please themselves in addition to sharing with others.

The structure of nonfiction texts were treated somewhat less precisely. When using nonfiction texts, most of the focus was spent on students and teachers identifying the main idea and three details. In both classrooms, the expressed purpose of reading nonfiction texts was purely for gaining information. Despite the fact that some students enjoyed reading nonfiction texts—Cory for example, spent days poring over a book all about cars—by contrasting “entertaining” fiction stories with “informative” nonfiction stories, the subtle message was that nonfiction texts were not supposed to be enjoyable and one could not expect to learn anything true from fiction texts.

Most of the other texts used in the classrooms were worksheets and what I refer to as isolated texts, words or short groups of words that were used in specific contexts.

These texts included charts, flashcards, labels, and sentences written on the chart paper.
Most of these texts were created and used during instructional time and solely by the teacher. Susan did have students frequently used individual white boards to copy and manipulate texts during instructional rug time, but the temporary nature of these texts did not make much impact on students as being connected to anything outside those events. Although Donna expressed the sense that “literacy involves anything that has to do with reading of any kind in any manner and in any place,” isolated texts were used for single purposes and not generally treated as “real” reading. Students encountered their spelling words in multiple contexts, but the physical texts themselves did not generally transcend other events or contexts. A few exceptions were when Donna and her students created charts during instructional time and posted them during seatwork for students to refer to while completing their worksheets. On the following page are examples of the few times Donna created texts during instructional time that were heavily used during seatwork.

These texts crossed literacy events and spaces and were used for different purposes, which was unique. Donna created these texts during instructional rug time (she later typed and printed out a large copy of the reference text document), and posted them so her students could refer to them during seatwork. Initially, most students did not use these texts unless I or Donna told them to, reinforcing the view that they saw these texts as isolated. Gradually, several students began to routinely check available reference texts that were either posted on the wall or in the chart.

The use of worksheets provided an interesting contrast between the two classrooms. Students in Donna’s class were assigned worksheets daily, and often encountered the same structure repeatedly. They were quite comfortable with most of the structures and by the middle of the school year; Donna rarely had to explain the
instructions unless she was introducing a new structure. Conversely, the day Susan
assigned worksheets during the mid-year tests, students were highly confused and most
ended up asking me for help. Because they were familiar with the words, it wasn’t the
content that confused them, but the text structure. In both classes, any time a new text
structure was given to the students, they struggled with completing the task, even if the
content of the material was familiar. In order to interact with texts they way they were

Figure 13: List of contractions

Figure 14: Descriptions of common reference texts
expected, students needed to have an understanding not only of the content but also of the structure and purpose of each text they encountered.

Value of texts

The values classroom participants placed on texts largely depended on the purposes for which they were used and who was using them. Most of these values were assigned by the teachers, but students had their own values for texts. As students learned that not every text had the same purpose in events, they were also learning that some texts were less valuable than others. In one instance, Susan assigned a *Time for Kids* article for students to read once they were finished with a previous assignment. When Becca asked for help with it, Susan’s response was, “Help with what? It’s just supposed to entertain you for a few minutes.” Susan was expressing to Becca that this particular text was not valuable enough to understand or work with, it was just a time-waster. This idea of certain texts being “just supposed to entertain you” also implied a lack of importance to texts that were meant to entertain.

The students had certain texts they considered valuable which did not always connect with texts the teachers valued. Texts students valued could be seen in what they chose during free reading time and from the library and what they chose to share with others. Joke books and song books were passed around frequently and students enjoyed making and sharing personally created texts. Susan in particular used this interest and created assignments in which students shared texts they had created and illustrated. Because students valued their own work, Susan would post some text creations on the window or bulletin board (see figures on the following page), something Donna hardly
ever did (she did display pictures and texts given to her as presents by her students, though and projects in both classes were occasionally displayed in the hallway).

Some texts were almost completely ignored in the classrooms and had a minimal purpose and low value to daily events. Both classrooms were filled with posters, signs and other texts like them that were hardly ever referred to. Susan had a set of posters describing “What makes a good teacher” and “What makes a good student” (see below).

Although they carried a subtle message regarding what kind of student they were expected to be, these texts were never directly referred to in classroom events. Despite being large and originally displayed prominently over Susan’s desk (until she rearranged the room), they were backgrounded for most students. Matthew’s desk for much of the time was directly under the posters and sometimes even facing the wall, so he read them more than anyone else. Because of the placement, most students did not see these as valuable texts, but for Matthew, whose view was taken up with them at times, they became his main attention-getters.

Figure 15: Students’ writings are displayed in Susan’s class.
Based on the definition of alphabetic text I am using, images were not precisely texts, but they conveyed meaning and were a significant part of the classroom literacy practices so it was important to consider how texts and images were connected and valued in these two classrooms. A number of messages were conveyed to students relating to the use of images in texts, some of which were conflicting. Part of this conflict came from the perceived purpose of texts and ultimately, the value of images with texts was dependent upon the teachers.

During most of the events that included reading stories in the Story Town book, Donna and Susan would discuss the genre with their students, which included fiction, realistic fiction, autobiography, biography, nonfiction, and pourquoi tale. Part of this discussion included questions of what each genre meant and how students could tell what kind of genre it was. Donna and Susan emphasized image type as being the key indicators
between fiction and nonfiction: if there were photographs, students were told it was most likely nonfiction; illustrations meant fiction.

Susan: Do you think this is fiction or nonfiction?
Stephen: non-fiction
Susan: why do you think it is nonfiction? How can we tell without even reading it?
Becca: because it is a photograph
Susan: right

(Field notes, 10/27/2010)

In making this connection, Donna and Susan were helping students prepare for understanding the images in textbooks but were also drawing a clear distinction between text formats and continuing the rigidity of text formats and values.

The distinction between images in texts caused a bit of confusion when students read “Bees,” a nonfiction piece, which was, as the title suggests, about bees. Numerous photographs were included but there were also illustrations, mostly of the anatomy of bees. Donna pointed out to her class that although the author was listed, there was no illustrator, because the illustrator did not make up the pictures and only copied something real. Under this perspective, illustrations did not count unless they were wholly original and not “copied” from something real, and if this were connected to classroom texts, students’ illustrations were not valuable unless they were original.

This message was in direct contrast to Donna’s insistence that students’ illustrations be specific and realistic. During poetry centers, after highlighting the assigned grammar or spelling patterns, students were expected to illustrate the poems or nursery rhymes. Although some of the poems used had various concepts in them, Donna
was very clear about what they were to draw and how the illustrations were supposed to look. Although Donna told me students had choices about whether or not they illustrated their work, this wasn’t evident in my observations.

Your other poem is called "The cat and the fiddle" and again, you should know these...When you do this one you have to draw a cat and a dog and a moon and a cow and a dish and a spoon. You have to draw all that and if you're really good, you'll draw the cow jumping over the moon. But if you can't do that, then just draw a cow and the moon. (Donna, 10/06/2010)

These illustrations not only had to be specific in content, but also realistic. Students were expected to make sure their illustrations matched what the text said and real life. At times, students wanted to add to their illustrations, but were not allowed because they were to keep to just what the text said. This was contrary to the stories students read, as many stories had illustrations that provided information not in the texts.

The illustrations for students’ personal writings also had to be realistic. In the following example, students were told to change their picture because they had used the “wrong” colors for a person.

A man is not green! ... What color is a man? Are you purple? Are you green? Are you blue? What color are you?... And what color am I?... No, I'm not, this [paper] is white. Tan or peach. (Donna, 09/30/2010)

This event involved a White student illustrating himself and Donna insisted that he was not the color white, but rather had to be shaded “tan or peach.” When referring to skin color in general, Donna was more wide-ranging, talking about the various shades skin color can be. Skin tones were not the only occasions in which Donna insisted upon
realism, as during Halloween, bat illustrations were expected to be brown, gray or black. With this insistence that illustrations be realistic, Donna was demonstrating to her students that illustrations did not really add anything to texts and were intended solely to show what was already in the text.

Similar to Donna, Susan frequently assigned illustrations as part of the texts students created, but although they were expected to create something relating to the assigned topic, they had free reign regarding what their illustrations looked like. Sometimes the illustrations were the primary focus of their work, such as when students were told to draw a picture of a time when they were afraid and then write a couple of sentences about it, or when students illustrated idioms for what was literally said, rather than what was meant. Images in Susan’s class were used to convey meaning, and at times were considered to carry more meaning than the accompanying texts.

There was a paradox in Susan’s classroom, however, which arose when students drew pictures outside of events when it was assigned. Then, Susan would tell her students “we don’t need a picture; that’s wasting time.” Susan was reinforcing to her students that it was her word that was the authority and deciding factor in her classroom, not the essence of the text and images themselves.

Lucy in particular enjoyed drawing and spent a lot of her seat time drawing in her notebook after she had finished her work, during transition time or when Susan was teaching with the Smart board. Her appreciation for drawing was evident when she spent a great deal of time on her idiom drawings (see figure on the following page). When other students were sharing or talking about their drawings as they created them, she refused to show her illustrations until she was finished, but once finished, Susan pointed
out how nice they were to the rest of the class. Most of the time, Susan told her to put the notebook away and scolded her for not paying attention, thereby demonstrating again that it was the obedience that was more highly prized than the acts themselves.

Conclusion

Students were surrounded by print in both classrooms, but the multiplicity of texts was connected to a variety of purposes and structures and each text was valued differently than others. Both the curriculum and teachers described stories and longer texts as having set structures and purposes. Texts were assigned different values, which depended largely on the purposes and structures assigned by the teachers. Images were meaningful to Donna and Susan based on their usefulness in classroom literacy events. Texts were rigidly defined by the teachers with singular purposes and students sometimes struggled to conform to teachers’ perspectives.

Figure 17: Lucy’s idioms illustration
Teacher and Student Agency

During this research, I began to examine how the literacy practices in these two classrooms were used as agentive forces by the participants. It is important to note that it wasn’t the texts themselves that encouraged agency, but rather the literacy practices and how texts were used that encouraged or discouraged agency. At first glance, teachers appeared to have a great deal of agency in the classrooms because they created the structure, and thereby literacy practices of the classroom, but because of outside curriculum and district expectations, teachers’ agency both for themselves and for their students were somewhat constrained.

In discussing agency in this section, I present different degrees to which teachers’ classroom literacy practices demonstrated their own agency and how they worked to help students and encourage their agency. I will also address how students themselves perceived their own agency to benefit both themselves and those around them. For students, the level of agency they felt largely depended upon how teachers created classroom literacy practices and whether or not the teachers themselves felt a strong sense of agency.

Agency in curricular texts

As was discussed in previous sections, the practices prescribed in the curriculum were designed encourage conformity and adherence to a strict, scripted schedule. As such, curriculum materials were not designed to encourage either student or teacher agency. Donna explained that when the curriculum was assigned, teachers asked the district leaders how they were to complete every event, because they were unable to realistically enact each event in their classrooms. They were told that the intent was for
teachers to be able to choose which events they wanted to use, that administrators knew there were too many events to realistically enact in the classroom. The printed schedule and detailed, progressive nature of the curriculum (see Appendices L and M) did not imply changeability, however. The implications in both the district schedule and the curriculum were that teachers would follow the same schedule each day, without fail. These texts were the antithesis of encouraging agency, being rigidly set and authoritative.

This presumption of what student and teachers’ actions would be extended to a presumption of their responses to texts and activities. As discussed before, the purpose of fiction stories was presented as for enjoyment, and this concept was presented in such a way that there was little room for doubt. When, early in the year, the story Arthur’s Reading Race was introduced, the curriculum directed the teacher to tell the students that “this is a story they will enjoy.” It was presented almost as a command to enjoy the text. When discussing other texts, Susan made the statement, “If it was boring, we wouldn’t read it.” This again, was a presumption of a choice that wasn’t present for the students. The students were reading texts because they were told to, but the official message was that it was and would be enjoyable, ignoring their lack of choice in the matter.

The messages within the curriculum were conflicting, in that the structure allowed for no teacher or student agency, but the stories implied a significant expectation of student agency. Several stories presented children taking the initiative and solving problems. These “self-made man” stories implied to children that they had the power to change their lives and make decisions independent of parents. In Jamaica Louise James, described above, the main character took it upon herself to make people’s lives better by decorating and personalizing the subway station where her grandmother worked. The
A biography of George Washington Carver focused strongly on Carver’s efforts working alone in the face of challenges to make people’s lives better. Both of these stories not only emphasized individuals solving their personal problems, but the solutions were aimed at improving the lives of others. This work-to-benefit-others story line was also evident in *Annie’s Gift*, by Angela Shelf Medearis, a story about a young girl whose siblings were musically talented. Annie took lessons in several instruments, but each time, she was discouraged from continuing because she did poorly. Finally, Annie wrote a poem about how she felt and shared it with her parents thereby realizing her talents lay in poetry. Rather than encourage students to enjoy the arts simply for enjoyment or keep trying to improve, the moral of the story was that possessing innate talent and pleasing others was the goal, rather than pleasing oneself.

In contrast to this was a Reader’s Theater play called “What’s my job,” set up similarly to the 1950s game show “What’s my line,” in which players asked questions to guess the career of the Mystery Guest. The twist in the story was that the three players collectively only had three guesses and in the story Player 2 unwisely wasted two guesses and was prevented by the other players from making a third guess. When Player 3 made the guess instead, he won. Despite the fact that all players did the work, “there can only be one winner.” Although the theme of one person working to benefit the whole was reversed in this story, the theme of a single person succeeding at the end was consistent.

The messages in the curriculum both discouraged and encouraged agency. Teacher agency was discouraged through the strongly directive texts, and students were given few choices in activities and what texts to read, but the messages in the stories
themselves partly encouraged student agency, that they could choose to make their lives better.

Teacher agency

Despite the fact that the curriculum was not designed to encourage teachers to make changes or decisions for themselves, both Donna and Susan exercised varying degrees of personal agency in determining classroom literacy events and practices. Understanding how teachers used their literacy practices to become agents of themselves was a bit difficult because the main purpose of their jobs was to teach students and encourage their advancement, so anything teachers did affected not only their own needs but their students’. Most of teachers’ actions were designed to benefit others, not themselves, but there was something to be said for their decisions being designed to enhance their own desires and needs as well. Partly because of their experiences, Donna and Susan exercised their agency at varying levels.

When past curricular changes were made, Donna was part of a group of teachers who spoke to district leaders about the need for change. When the new curriculum was assigned, teachers were told that officially they had to all be on the same page, but gradually they were allowed to change. Though district policy may have allowed for changes and alterations, there were some who district leaders who still insisted that teachers to stick strictly to the curriculum. “It depends on who you ask,” according to Donna. “Part of it too is experience…it doesn’t tell you that there’s lenience in there. After you’ve been in the district for a while you learn what lenience you can take, what advantages you can take.” Donna had been teaching in the district long enough to know if she wanted things changed, she was expected to take the initiative and ask, or change
them herself without asking. Part of her willingness to exercise this agency originated from her experiences as a special education teacher when there was little to the special education programs.

When I started I had special needs, though, and they had nothing written for special needs. They did not have textbooks they did not have anything. So we kind of had to fly by the seat of our pants day one…And back then the idea was, ‘well they're special needs, it doesn't make that big of a deal.’ But it did to us and it did to the kids, so we probably worked a whole lot harder than most people had to. (Donna, 10/11/2010)

With these experiences, Donna developed an awareness that personal agency was something she had to seek and exercise for herself; no one was going to treat the teachers as people with a strong sense of agency unless they stood up for their own rights and needs and those of their students.

Susan’s experiences on the other hand, limited her personal sense of agency. Her undergraduate experiences involved learning to follow whatever curriculum was assigned to her and described her teaching methods as, “I teach it primarily by using the materials that Middleton City Schools provides me.” Although Susan did make her own changes, she recognized some ambiguity in the official regulations and did not feel as free as Donna in making changes. This hesitancy was evident in Susan’s interviews, when she said that she “thinks” they can change the curriculum, repeating this word often. From Susan’s standpoint, texts and the district held authority over her, so she felt a limited sense of power to alter and adapt texts.
In changing the curriculum to suit their needs, Donna and Susan were exercising a significant degree of agency for themselves. Susan and Donna both changed the curriculum based on not only what they thought students needed but also on what they thought would best suit their own teaching styles. Both teachers translated their own needs to what they assume students needed as well. Donna structured her class to allow students to freely move around and make their own decisions because, with ADHD, she struggled with sitting still herself sometimes. Susan said she altered “whatever I get bored with. I'm not good at sticking with any one thing for very long and I get bored very easily…If I'm bored they're probably bored.” Donna and Susan were making assumptions that their students’ preferences matched their own, but they were also altering their classroom literacy practices to advance their own professional development and suit their wishes.

In addition to altering the classroom events and structure to suit their own feelings, Donna and Susan changed the content in the curriculum and certain literacy practices because they felt it was lacking or they preferred different teaching strategies or literacy events. Donna, having taught for over 30 years, had a number of preferred texts and activities that she supplemented in her lessons. She recognized that she deviated “probably more than the district would like me to” because she tailored classroom practices to students’ needs, including using book boxes. The book boxes and implementing reading strategies lessons were some of Donna’s most obvious alterations. Adding texts to the classroom, Donna was exercising personal agency for herself and for her students’ benefit. Book boxes, in particular aided students’ sense of choice, because
they had a collection of texts they were able to read and could decide which text they wanted to read during free time.

Susan did not believe the curriculum was a “full representation of what they need to know” and tried to add various texts and events throughout the year, mostly through writing or adding spelling and phonics activities. The fact that Donna and Susan felt they had the right to question and change curricular texts demonstrated a significant sense of agency in their professional work.

The most obvious constraints on teachers’ agency were the mandated testing. At the beginning, middle and end of the year, Susan and Donna were required to test each student in math and reading, a process which took 2-4 weeks, depending on scheduling constraints and student improvement. Each student was individually tested, reading leveled texts until they reached their current level. This was somewhat frustrating for the teachers when they assessed students whose levels they already knew based on observations. They felt it was a waste of time to have students read several texts solely for the data, but they had little choice. Some students demonstrated remarkable improvement, so it was helpful to the teachers, but took a great deal of time. For example, Matthew was reading at a first-grade level at the beginning of the year and went to daily tutoring until the middle of the year assessments, when, after several hours of individual testing, he finally ended up at level M, which is where students were expected to be at the end of second grade. Knowing he had advanced so far provided a significant boost of confidence for Matthew, and other students who also advanced.

The testing was particularly frustrating regarding students who scored high at the beginning of the year. Donna and Susan were expected to conduct weekly assessments on
students who were low-scoring, but students who scored high at the beginning of the year were not to be assessed until the middle of the year. This was a source of frustration not only for the teachers but also the students and parents. Because Lucy scored at the high third-grade level at the beginning of the year, her reading level had not been assessed for four months and her mother frequently asked Susan how her reading was progressing, but Susan was unable to tell her. There was a strong sentiment that once students achieved average expectations, little was to be done for them.

Once they reach the point where they are at second grade level, we don't have to test them anymore until the end of the school year, so, like Lucy, she started the year off on Q…my Palm won't even let me test her. We have to do these progress monitoring things like every week or so. It tells you which kids you have to progress monitor. I haven't even heard her read yet. (Susan, 06/2011)

Because of these testing constraints, Donna and Susan were not able to fully help their students or even group them the way they would prefer; the test scores were considered more valuable than the teachers’ experiences and observations and teachers believed their agency was hindered by testing mandates.

*Teachers as agents of others*

Donna and Susan’s efforts to exercise their own agency were in part guided by their efforts to help students become agents for themselves. Naturally they wanted their students to learn and succeed, but Donna in particular also wanted her students to become independent and take initiative for themselves and their own learning and advancement. She recognized that students did not believe they had any choices in life and so tried to
give them choices and help them see that they could use reading and texts to become agents of themselves.

So a lot of times around here I point out to the kids you know, hey guys, you see, you learn how to read this, you know those notes mom makes? You know those letters she writes to me? You know the notes I make? …You know, you guys could be doing it too. You know, you could be reading in my notes, you could be reading all that stuff, knowing what's going on. (Donna, 10/11/2010)

Donna used her students’ desire to know what was happening to give them a reason to work harder and learn, not only because she wanted them to but because it was in their best interests. She made an effort to point out to them that “they know a lot of stuff” because “they didn’t know they knew it. Nobody bothered to show them.” Because of achievement gaps and economic and classroom constraints, Donna had seen many students become defeated quickly, believing little good would come of their efforts, or being too worried about outside struggles to fully focus on academics. Students who struggled with homelessness; loved ones in prison; and parents who abused drugs could easily feel their lives were out of control. For example, when asked if any of the stories he had read were like his home, Matthew answered an immediate “no.” Although I asked him why, all he would say was, “You don’t want to know what goes on in my house.” Cory’s description of visiting his uncle in prison was given very matter-of-factly, as if it was the norm. These recognitions of family hardship encroached upon students’ school lives and led them to believe there was little in their lives they could control. Donna and Susan’s efforts for students were mostly academically focused and both teachers realized they had little recourse in alleviating the hardships in their students’ lives.
Donna and Susan knew some students needed academic help, so they tried to give it in any way possible. This mostly came in the form of helping students get to a point where they could learn and act independently in school. Second grade was treated as a transition year, between first grade and kindergarten, when students were more in need of lots of attention and help and upper elementary grades, when students took the state standardized test and were expected to learn and act more independently. Both Donna and Susan felt it was their responsibility to help students see that they had the right, ability and responsibility to behave independently and responsibly and Susan in particular reminded her students frequently regarding the need for them to improve and work harder.

The teachers also changed the content according to what they personally felt students needed to know. Both Susan and Donna supplemented the curriculum during the time around Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and Black History month to include lessons about slavery, Harriet Tubman, the Underground Railroad and the civil rights movement. Both teachers did this because they considered it important and Susan was surprised that “even my African American students” didn’t have any awareness of the issues. Donna and Susan’s decisions to include literacy events that focused on such sensitive issues indicated a desire for their students to develop a greater sense of personal agency in ethical social issues.

At times, however, the decisions Donna and Susan made hindered, rather than helped advance student agency. The most glaring example of this was in students’ opportunities to write and create texts. Personal writing can be an empowering experience when students are given the opportunities to reflect on and connect to
readings and express their own points of view. Most of the time, however, student writing was rigidly set and not conducive to enable students to develop a sense of personal agency.

Donna did encourage her students to write in their writers’ workshop journals, and students were allowed to write whatever they wanted. Joe, for instance, was fascinated with *Star Wars* and spent most of the year recreating a *Star Wars*-like story. Cory liked to write stories that involved his friends as the characters. This work was not a regularly assigned, however, and most of the time was only to be done when the rest of their work was finished. In March, Susan began implementing writing journals, but students were assigned a prompt, given a minimum amount to write and a set time frame in which to write it. Many of her students saw this as difficult and boring.

Susan, more than Donna, tried to incorporate events where students had the freedom to write in response to stories the class had read or pictures they created, but these were few and far between. For both teachers, most of the writing consisted of informative reports, answering comprehension questions or completing worksheets. As a result, the opportunity to encourage students to feel a sense of agency and control in their classrooms was lost.

*Student agency*

Students’ sense of agency and freedom varied between the classrooms and primarily depended upon teachers’ classroom literacy practices. Susan, with the sentiment that “they don’t really have any choices; they’re here to do the work and learn how to read and write and that’s, you know, their job,” did not encourage students to exercise their own agency in making decisions for themselves. As has already been
discussed, much of her classroom practices were based on all students doing the same things at the same time. Donna, on the other hand, said her students had “controlled” choices in how they learned, so they were able to choose the order of their work, sometimes with whom they worked or what they read, but the end result was according to Donna’s expectations. It was the students’ feelings that were of most interest to the concept of student agency: of the eight focal students interviewed, not one student believed they had choices in school. They recognized they had a choice to behave or misbehave, but they did not believe they had any choices in their learning or in literacy events.

In truth, students did have power. They had power over their own situations, over their own learning and over others’ situations in the classroom and they had choices in whether or not to comply. But having power and choices were not the same thing as exercising agency, because they rarely recognized and used this power to advance their own interests. Students occasionally recognized they had power in these areas and exercised it when they could, although ultimately it was the teacher who was in most control.

Power over their own situations was probably the most emphasized, as both Donna and Susan frequently told their students that they were responsible for their own learning. When Susan scolded her students about not succeeding in the second quarter, the implication was that her students could succeed if they simply chose to.

Students knew their power was neither absolute nor was it always theirs to control. They recognized they had the freedom to make both good and bad behavioral and learning choices. Good choices resulted in rewards, such as getting to go first in
lining up, special reading areas in Donna’s class, or candies. When Donna set up a “bat cave” in October and teepee in November, students who worked hard and behaved during seatwork were given time to read in the special areas. The consequence of poor choices ranged from a loss of agency, removal from social situations and having to participate in unpleasant literacy events. Peter rarely was allowed to enter the bat cave or teepee and frequently had to miss some of all of recess because he did not complete his assignments in time. Although he was fairly low achieving, Donna believed much of it was due to learned helplessness, so she would punish him for “fooling around” during seatwork time.

Misbehavior in a social setting almost always resulted in students’ removal from that setting, and the expectation was if students were going to participate, they needed to comply with the rules precisely. Susan would threaten students with loss of the right to participate during rug time if they were not sitting quietly in rows. It rarely happened that students lost their board and markers due to misbehavior, but the implication was that participation in literacy events was a privilege that could be taken away. At the beginning of the year, when the whole class was noisy during certain center work, which they enjoyed, she told them if they couldn’t control themselves, she would instead assign writing and worksheets. In addition to teaching students their freedom was controlled by the teacher, Susan was also teaching her students that some texts are enjoyable and others are punishments.

The most drastic consequence for misbehavior occurred in Donna’s class when, early in March, a significant change occurred. After having been away for a few days, I entered class one Monday morning to see all the students sitting in their seats working
silently and their discipline cards, which always start on green at the beginning of the
day, were all on red. Donna informed me that the whole class was in “boot camp.”
Whereas previously students were allowed to move around somewhat freely as needed,
students had to raise their hands to request help, be given a tissue or throw something
away. Bathroom trips were all taken together, when in the past students had an individual
bathroom pass they could use once in the morning and once in the afternoon. All lessons
were completed with students in their seats and not on the rug. The only people they
could ask for help were Donna, me, or other helpers that came during math time. While
normally discipline cards began on green and then moved to yellow, blue and red,
resulting in loss of privileges, students began on red and had to earn their way up.

After about a week of boot camp, students who consistently ended the day on
green began to receive more privileges. Students on green for five days were removed
from boot camp, moved to a back table and received normal privileges. Brittany, Keisha,
Joe and Mariah were among the first to move out. Donna had used this method before
and said the experience always worked to convince students of the need to enjoy their
learning without becoming completely out of control. This proved true for this class, as
students acknowledged in interviews that it was their misbehavior that caused the loss of
freedom and their responsible behavior that would result in a renewal of their freedoms.

Susan and Donna frequently emphasized students’ role in their own learning, that
they had to work hard in order to succeed, and in some students told me a person was a
good reader because they worked hard and practiced. The more successful students
became, the more personal agency they recognized regarding their learning. When
Matthew’s reading level rose and he was allowed to leave the tutoring group, his reaction
to school altered. Although he was still quite rambunctious and was sent out of the room for outbursts on occasion, he realized his success in reading was due to his own efforts and he had an easier time focusing on his work. Donna in particular emphasized students’ roles in their own learning. If students wanted to read a book that was above their reading level, she allowed them to. If they could prove to her that they could decode and comprehend it, it was added to their book box.

Although students recognized they had some control over their situations based on good or bad choices, ultimately, the control was in their teachers’ hands. What they learned, what they read and how they learned was wholly dependent upon Donna and Susan’s decisions. Students’ choices were instead reactionary, rather than agentive.

*Students as agents of others*

Students’ power over others was one way they exercised their limited sense of agency in times when they felt they had no other choices. They recognized they had the freedom to both help or hinder their classmates, and most of the time, they felt a strong need to help one another, not only to help them advance with their work and learning but also in times of stress. When Matthew tried to comfort Jasmine (described in Student Responsibility), his only aim was to help her, although it resulted in him being scolded. Keisha frequently received help from classmates, in part, Donna believed, because she was such a likeable girl and everyone wanted to see her succeed. Her classmates recognized that she was very low achieving and struggled to understand assigned texts, so they worked with her when they could.

Students also recognized they had the power to negatively affect their classmates. Although this did not happen often in my observations, there were a few times, such as
the one below, during which students exercised this power. In the instance below, Matthew was looking at a book that was of interest to several students. Lucy had been asking him to share it, but he refused her, choosing instead to share it with Becca.

Lucy: Matthew, when you're done reading the Pokemon book, can I read it?
Matthew: I'm reading it.
Matthew sat and held the book up to his face so Lucy couldn’t see the pictures.
Matthew (to Becca, sitting on his other side): just ask me “can I see the Pokemon book and you can get it out of my desk.
Lucy: can I see the Pokemon book?
Matthew: let me alone! (Field notes, 03/10/2011)

In denying Lucy access to his book and going so far as to provide another classmate access, Matthew was using his book to exert dominance over Lucy. Similar power struggles happened on occasion in both classrooms, with students choosing to help or refusing to help certain classmates. These decisions did not always relate to personal disputes, but rather were a means of exerting power in the one way they knew how.

When students believed they had few choices or freedom, they made use of the power they did have. Although they could not affect classroom literacy practices and sometimes felt they had little effect over their own lives, they exercised the agency they did have: the power to affect their classmates’ lives.

Conclusion

The concept of literacy as agentive was a bit difficult to identify in these classrooms, in part because literacy practices were sometimes agentive for the teachers but not necessarily for students, and this varied between the classrooms. Whether or not students felt any sense of agency in large part depended upon whether or not the teacher
felt a sense of agency. Donna felt a significant sense of agency and thereby felt it was her responsibility to encourage agency in her students. Susan, on the other hand, did not feel a strong sense of agency and maintained a tightly controlled classroom. Ultimately, as with other literacy practices, agency in the classrooms was determined by the teachers and their own literacy practices.

Summary of findings

In this study, I wanted to understand the literacy practices that existed in Donna and Susan’s classrooms during literacy instruction time. In examining classroom literacy events, I sought to learn in what ways literacy was local, global, social, multiple and agentive. What I found was that while the many values and expectations placed on students came from numerous sources, including teachers, the curriculum and even students’ own beliefs, ultimately, Donna and Susan determined practices. To the degree they recognized this control depended strongly upon whether or not they felt a strong personal sense of agency.

Donna and Susan were responsible for structuring literacy events and frequently it was their definition that held sway over their students. Often this meaning depended upon the teachers’ intent. Although generally, all participants contribute to literacy events, in classrooms it was the teachers who structured literacy events according to their own wishes and preferences. Occasionally both Donna and Susan tried to consider what their students would prefer, but they rarely directly invited input.

Similar to their different perspectives in the construction of literacy events, both teachers had different understandings of what had meaning and how meaning was to be understood. Susan’s treatment of meaning was closely connected to the meaning in texts
and the curriculum and she maintained a singular control of meaning and valued the product over the process. Texts, particularly student-created texts, were considered meaningful when they followed a set structure. In both Donna and Susan’s classrooms, texts were valuable according to the specific purposes and structures set by the teachers and curriculum.

For Donna, every text had meaning. Meaning was variable and could be challenged and Donna encouraged her students to challenge the meaning in texts, although she had the final say in whether or not their meaning was accepted. The meaningfulness of a text varied as well, and the meaningfulness of student-created texts depended upon the effort students put in and where they were in their achievement, with the process being more valuable than the product.

Despite the fact that Donna and Susan were in charge of structuring classroom literacy events, outside authorities frequently encroached upon classroom events. The authority figures from these outside structures frequently determined whether or not students would be able to have special events and forced weeks of testing events into the classrooms. This process and the information given to teachers were tightly controlled by the district-chosen program. In addition to outside authority figures having a say over students and teachers, Donna and Susan demonstrated that texts were also involved in the power structures and had authority over actions and spaces for both students and teachers.

Donna made these power structures visible and frequently positioned herself with the students. She demonstrated that it was sometimes possible to resist these expectations in subtle ways. This resistance, however, was sometimes contradictory, as Donna also made it clear that sometimes authorities must be obeyed no matter what. In presenting
this obedience to outside authorities, Donna was reinforcing students’ and her own lack of agency.

Literacy in the curriculum was not only authoritative but uniform. The rigidity gave the teachers the sense that there was supposed to be one way to teach every child. Despite the fact that there was some attempt at differentiated instruction, this only served to pigeonhole students further, as no matter their achievement levels, they were expected to fit into one of the three groups. In most events, students were expected to use the same texts and do the same work in the same amount of time.

Certain lifestyles and family structures were presented as typical. The normalized lives in curriculum stories were very different from the students’ lives and homes. Contrary to the normalization of suburban, middle-class lifestyles, there was a clear effort in the curriculum to represent linguistically diverse names. Rather than create a more diverse curriculum, however, it instead served to highlight the European mindset in the curriculum and held by the teachers, as the diversity of characters themselves extended only to skin color.

In both classrooms students were expected to be responsible for their own work and texts, but like other classroom practices, Donna and Susan’s expectations for their students’ classroom responsibilities were different from each other. They both had strong expectations for students to take responsibility for their personal learning, but it manifested itself in different ways. In Susan’s class, this responsibility was carefully controlled and limited. Students were responsible for doing each task as it was given to them and following directions carefully. Donna extended her students’ responsibilities and gave them more freedom to choose in what order they finished their work. These
choices, however, were limited and fairly superficial and not recognized by her students as true freedom.

There were significant differences between how the curriculum represented agency, the teachers’ personal sense of agency and the students.’ Curriculum texts were not designed to be agentive. In fact, prescribed literacy events were structured in such a way as to tightly control teachers’ and students’ actions. In scripting teachers’ words and providing even the simplest answers to their questions, the curriculum denied teachers the freedom to make their own choices. Although some of the messages in curriculum stories presented characters as taking actions to make their lives better with the “self-made man” perspective, many of the choices characters made were focused on making others’ lives better, not their own. Donna and Susan carried this theme over in focusing on students’ moral responsibility to one another during literacy events.

Despite the fact that the curriculum was not designed to encourage agency, the teachers exercised varying levels of personal agency in their classrooms. Susan had been primarily taught to follow the curriculum and when she made her own changes, she was hesitant and unsure. Donna recognized teachers needed to take the initiative to change things in their classrooms. Both teachers felt a strong enough sense of agency to add content, events and practices they believed were important and lacking in the curriculum. These additions not only helped students but also aided the teachers in their work.

Despite the fact that Donna insisted her students had some freedom in her classroom literacy practices, none of the students in either class expressed a strong sense of agency. They did not believe they had choices in classroom structures or in their lives. They recognized they had the power to obey rules or disobey, but they knew this power
could be taken away and did not believe the results of these actions were significant. Ultimately, the teachers were in charge. In addition to recognizing they had power in their own lives, students knew they had the power to make their classmates’ lives better or worse. In choosing how they behaved toward their fellow students, they knew they could positively or negatively affect them.

As this study presented, the literacy practices in classrooms largely depend upon the teachers and the curriculum. The degree to which these sometimes contrary perspectives influenced the classrooms depended upon the agency the teachers felt and whether they felt they had the right to challenge curricular expectations.
Chapter 6: Conclusions and implications

Theoretical framework

As I observed and identified the literacy events in Donna and Susan’s classrooms my goal was to find patterns of practice that revealed the values held by the participants. My data collection and analysis was framed around a New Literacy Studies perspective and the assumption that literacy was defined in part by participants. Rather than consider a single, neutral definition of literacy, I instead sought the patterns that made up the literacy practices of these two classrooms. Within these practices were specific values and beliefs regarding how students and teachers were to interact with texts. The varying levels of authority in the classrooms also influenced participants’ roles in text and meaning creation, as teachers had greater control than students, so their expectations held greater sway in classroom practices.

Classroom texts were not created solely by classroom participants, however, and when recognizing that texts are not neutral, but instead have values and meanings placed upon them, it was important to consider the expectations of those who created and assigned the texts. These meanings were often imposed upon the participants, and this hidden curriculum could not be ignored in such value-laden practices.

With this framework in mind, I considered the literacy practices in Donna and Susan’s classrooms and how they were created and influenced by both participants and outside parties. Part of this influence included trying to understand how participants with
different levels of authority negotiated meaning together and whose meaning dominated literary instruction.

Implications for pedagogy

The purpose of this study was to understand the literacy practices of the literacy blocks in two second grade classrooms. As children were being taught how to decode texts, they were also being socialized to specific values, some of which originated in the curriculum and some of which belonged to the teachers. Although students brought their own beliefs to the classroom community, they were expected to conform to teachers’ values and those represented in the curriculum. At times these values were conflicting and led to frustration with the teachers and confusion with the students.

The results of this study are highly useful not only for current teachers, but also for other stakeholders in the education community, specifically teacher educators and curriculum writers. The most basic question of what messages are embedded within instruction is the issue of how literacy is defined in instruction. How teachers, teacher educators, curriculum writers and district administrators define literacy and the values associated with it affect classroom instruction.

Teachers

The most significant conclusion I came to at the end of this study was that teachers wield a large amount of influence in their classrooms. Certainly this concept is not overly groundbreaking, but the significance and scope of this influence is incredible. Not only do teachers have the ability to instruct students in factual knowledge and skills, but they also influence their ways of seeing themselves and the world.
In demonstrating to their students that texts carry authority, Susan and Donna were placing themselves and their students as on a lower hierarchical plane than texts, and teaching their students that obedience to authority is of utmost importance. Donna’s demonstration that this authority can sometimes be challenged contradicted this somewhat, but because these challenges were generally superficial, the message stood. Students—and sometimes teachers—were at the mercy of a higher power, and the best thing to do was to get used to it. This sentiment is quite a blow for the hope that students will develop a sense of personal agency.

Being at the mercy of higher authorities can leave teachers with a constrained sense of personal agency, which is sometimes reflected in their teaching. Outside authorities determine the content and goals of the classrooms and dictate the methods and materials teachers are to use to reach those goals. These expectations may not always be uniform in all schools; how a district defines a school can vary depending on socioeconomic status the expectations placed on teachers can have a significant impact. While Clayton Elementary teachers felt a strong pressure to improve test scores and counteract the difficult lives their students sometimes faced, teachers in neighboring schools had greater resources to meet the expected progress and likely felt less pressure and control. Believing they had few opportunities to change their and their students’ situations, Donna and Susan struggled to recognize much personal agency.

Before they can help students feel a sense of agency, teachers need to first recognize their own agency and the power they hold in their classrooms. Despite the influence held by the district administrators and those who framed the school as one in need of improvement, both Donna and Susan wielded a significant amount of power in
their classrooms. Teachers can help each other recognize this power by sharing classroom practices with one another and helping one another identify their influences.

Teachers need to be aware of the influence they hold over students and how their personal literacy practices are represented in the classrooms. The first step to this is for teachers to examine just what their personal values and beliefs are, not an easy task by any means. One of the first questions I asked Donna and Susan was “what is literacy?” It was a difficult question to answer, but is a good starting point for a teacher to begin to understand how he or she defines it. Following that, I asked “how do you use reading and writing in your work and daily lives?” It was important to see how they made the distinction between classroom texts and home texts. Of course, in order to delve deep into this question, teachers would need to keep detailed accounts of what texts they used and how in both classroom and home settings. Once they have an understanding of how they use and define texts (Do they consider text messages to be “real reading”? Does it have to be on pen and paper?), they can have a better understanding of how texts exist in their lives and what they value.

Personal reflection and evaluation are always difficult, as was evidenced in how both Donna and Susan struggled to articulate how they would define literacy or what their beliefs were. These beliefs are so deep-seated, many people struggle to identify them, which is why it would be especially useful if teachers went through this process together, so they could help one another evaluate and probe their beliefs. Such a process would be time-consuming, but the results could be quite rewarding if teachers are willing to go through it.
When they are able to examine and identify their own personal beliefs regarding literacy, the teachers will be able to identify how those beliefs play out in their classrooms. What values are they imposing upon their students, and what expectations do they have for their students? Similar to my observations, teachers can examine their classroom practices through methodical analysis. Many teachers already do this to gain a better understanding of their pedagogical effectiveness. In addition to questioning whether their instructional methods were effective, teachers also need to question what other expectations they express to their students. In many ways, Donna was going through that process and was constantly trying to articulate her worldview to both me and her students. In becoming more aware of their own worldviews, teachers will be able to address the differences in their classrooms without suppressing them.

In this current state of education, schools are becoming increasingly diverse, with students from a diverse multitude of nationalities and communities, and each student has his or her own set of experiences and values, some of which will be shared by fellow students or the teacher and some of which will not be. If teachers wish to create a democratic classroom, where each child’s beliefs are respected, they first need to work to understand what those beliefs are. It could be more difficult, particularly for young children, as they also would struggle to articulate how they see the world. This is where communities come in: the more teachers learn about their students’ homes and communities, the more they will be able to understand what worldviews children are coming from. Teachers can learn about children’s home cultures by creating literacy events in which children are encouraged to share about themselves. Writing, as was noted in the previous chapter, can be a useful tool for encouraging students to feel a strong
sense of agency and it can also be useful for bridging the gap between home and school. Creating classrooms in which writing and talking about home are commonplace demonstrates to students that the values and practices in their homes are respected and welcome in their classrooms.

There would be many teachers who would resist the notion of creating classrooms that acknowledged and challenged their worldviews. For one thing, the added work of introspection and self-evaluation can seem daunting. In addition, there may be some teachers who, like Susan, would prefer to not have to address students’ emotional needs, and would rather be able to teach their assigned subjects. This is why it is important to encourage not only teachers, but future teachers to see the necessity of creating classrooms that provide a space for everyone’s voices to be heard.

*Teacher education*

If we hope to change how literacy is viewed and taught in schools, there needs to be a fundamental shift in how literacy is presented in teacher education programs. When literacy education classes present literacy as a set of neutral, value-free skills, teachers will perpetuate the perspective. Teachers’ expectations and beliefs will naturally come to the fore, as Donna and Susan’s did, but unless they recognize the cultural nature of literacy, these practices would be presented as monolithic and students’ practices would be marginalized. As such, teacher education programs need to include a focus on teaching literacy as a value-laden, cultural construct, and instruction needs to encourage future teachers to examine their own literacy practices and question what values are represented in their instruction.
Most self-respecting teacher education programs include courses on phonics, writing and reading comprehension strategies, but few that ask future teachers to question how they see and define literacy. In a way, this reveals much regarding the values of the literacy program. Instead of presenting a unified worldview, teacher education programs need to include a variety of perspectives regarding literacy and address how different groups and cultures use and value reading and writing. In addition, asking professors and students to examine their own understandings of literacy will help students be better prepared for the issues they will encounter in their classrooms.

A significant effect of making one’s literacy practices visible is that teachers would then be more aware of what values they would be imposing on their students and therefore be able to question and change their classroom practices. Ignoring this concept would be doing a great disservice to future teachers.

Encouraging teachers to question their own literacy practices would also have the result that teachers would feel more prepared to question the practices of the curriculum and consider how to create a democratic classroom. For teachers to feel prepared to structure their classrooms in such a way that respects and includes students’ literacy practices, they need to feel a strong enough sense of agency to possibly challenge the values of the curriculum and district mandates. It seemed that a significant hindrance to Susan’s sense of agency was that the main message of her teacher education experiences was to follow the curriculum provided by the district. Susan neither felt she had neither the necessary resources nor ability to help her students succeed and meet the expectations of her class. In fact, she seemed to sometimes doubt whether she had the right to make such changes.
Teacher education programs also need to prepare their students for the diverse experiences their students will have; a diversity that goes far beyond skin color. While some students’ homes may be very similar to the teachers, others will be vastly different, either because of different experiences, different languages or different values and practices. Susan, coming from an affluent neighborhood with few traumas in her life, felt very unprepared for her classroom. Teacher educators need to provide experiences where students will be aware of and comfortable with addressing this diversity. Providing experiences where future teachers spend more time in a variety of classrooms and have access to a wide variety of literature and lessons that will address diversity can better enable them to teach their students. When creating teacher education programs, colleges and universities need to prepare teachers for these experiences they will encounter in their classrooms and empower them to address these experiences well.

Curriculum developers

The results of this study had significant implications for curriculum developers and district personnel, as it was clear that the messages in curricular texts had an impact on classroom literacy practices. When district leaders are selecting and mandating a curriculum, they need to examine what values are represented in the texts and whether or not they want to impose those values on teachers and students.

One of the most basic issues at stake here is how literacy is defined. As was discussed previously, the curriculum Donna and Susan were expected to use presented literacy as a set of clearly divisible skills, with an assumption that texts are used the same way everywhere and by everyone. Research has shown that this is not the case, as different groups of people use and value texts in different ways. When teachers want to
create democratic classrooms, in which students’ literacy practices are respected and included in classroom literacy practices, their efforts would be aided if the curriculum represented these values. District leaders and curriculum writers need to consider how they are defining literacy and how those definitions can either hinder or help teachers’ efforts.

As this study presented, the stories and texts in the curriculum had the message that children were expected to have specific experiences and certain lifestyles. Although there was a clear effort in the curriculum to include ethnically and linguistically diverse names, the lives characters lived were very similar and not representative of the lives of Donna and Susan’s students. Characters in the Story Town books did not experience poverty or crime, and children in the stories had either both parents at home or supportive family members.

When district leaders choose a curriculum, they select texts that are aligned with educational standards, but these are not the only contents. When mandating a curriculum, the purpose is for the intended content to aid teachers, most of which relates to teaching reading and writing skills, but the messages hidden within become as official as the intended content. In making one lifestyle the official, sanctioned lifestyle, district leaders and curriculum writers marginalize all other possibilities. Instead of representing one particular lifestyle or family group, curriculum developers and district leaders need to include a representation of diverse families and homes. While there seemed to be a nod toward diversity, with linguistically diverse names and stories with non-white characters, some of this served to reinforce a White/Black dichotomy. Few Latino families were shown, and little else. While images occasionally depicted students of multiple skin
colors, curriculum developers need to broaden their definition of diversity, particularly by
going beyond racial or linguistic diversity and providing a broader representation of the
cultures with which students identify. To do this, they need to have an awareness of the
values and experiences children bring to the classroom and how their home cultures
might affect their learning and how teachers might need to structure their classrooms.
Honest, deliberate research is needed in a variety of classrooms so nationally recognized
curricula can represent the students who will be interacting with their texts.

Implications for future research

This research was intended to address some of the gaps in current research,
particularly New Literacy Studies and hidden curriculum research. Although many
current NLS researchers address how teachers have changed their classrooms to address
students’ home literacy practices, there remains a gap in research questioning the literacy
practices of classroom elementary literacy practices. In this study, I presented the literacy
practices of two second-grade classrooms, but more attention is needed in understanding
whole-school practices and how children’s experiences in early grades affect their
experiences in later grades. Doing so would help researchers understand how children’s
understanding of home versus school literacy practices change during their school
experiences and how individual teachers’ practices are connected to those of their fellow
teachers in the same schools. Understanding how schools themselves are communities
with literacy practices of their own can help researchers better understand where
classroom literacy practices originate and how they are influenced by larger community
practices.
The examination of the hidden messages in the curriculum and literacy practices revealed students were expected to have certain experiences and conform to specific values. This study only focused on the literacy curriculum, however. To get a fuller picture of the hidden curriculum in elementary classrooms, research needs to focus on the curriculum of all subjects, and on understanding how these messages connect. Similarly, this study focused only on the classroom literacy practices of the classroom literacy block, but in order to gain a deeper understanding of classroom literacy practices, researchers need to focus on the literacy practices of other areas of the day as well and on how these practices are similar or different.

Students in both classes reported feeling very limited sense of agency, but if teachers and researchers want to encourage more democratic classrooms, they need to focus on how to encourage students to have and recognize a personal sense of agency in the classroom. More study is needed on understanding how children’s sense of agency develops and how teachers encourage students’ sense of agency in the classroom.

Limitations of the study

No study is able to capture completely everything that goes on in a classroom and there are always limitations to one’s research. Because of district privacy rules, I was only allowed to observe students whose parents had signed permission forms. This resulted in me being able to record some rich points and students who could have provided valuable insights.

I was also limited in the fact that I was unable to video or audio record classroom procedures, again, due to district privacy rules. Although it resulted in me being more
careful and observant in the classroom, it would have been useful to be able to go back and review and confirm my field notes.

Using an ethnographic perspective was invaluable to understanding cultural beliefs, but I did not address issues of child development and whether or not students were learning what was expected. The focus of this research was more on underlying cultural values, not on instructional methods or student success.

In choosing to observe two classrooms, I was making a calculated decision. Although observing two classrooms enabled me to gain a richer understanding of similarities of practices, in dividing my time between the two, I did not observe either classroom in its entirety.

Conclusion

I began this study with the intent of understanding the literacy practices in two second-grade classrooms. What I found was that although these practices were defined by numerous power groups, the teachers were the main contributors of meaning. That they did not always recognize this demonstrates the extent of the power of outside groups, as teachers frequently felt controlled and powerless. Although students contributed to and participated in literacy events, their values regarding literacy were rarely included in classroom practices and they were expected to conform to the teacher’s values and those represented in the curriculum. If the goal is for classrooms to become more democratic, teachers need to work to create classrooms where students’ literacy values are respected and included in classroom literacy practices. With this study I believe I have deepened the understanding of classroom literacy practices by addressing the concept of agency and examining the hidden curriculum within a New Literacy Studies framework.
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List of Appendices

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# Appendix A

## Schedule of observation and questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus on curriculum</th>
<th>What cultural values are represented in the district-chosen curriculum?</th>
<th>Analysis of curricular materials (possible interview with district administrator)</th>
<th>Phase One</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What literacy events are prescribed in the curricular materials?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What themes (such as topics of writing and reading materials) are evident in the curricular materials?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What cultural values are teachers and students expected to have as represented in the instructional materials?</td>
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<th>Focus on instructional time</th>
<th>What cultural values are represented in the instructional time?</th>
<th>Observation, analysis of instructional materials, interview with teachers</th>
<th>Phase Two</th>
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<td></td>
<td>• What literacy events occur during literacy instructional time?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Aug-Sept (3 weeks)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Who is involved in these literacy events? (And who is not?)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sept (1 week)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What themes (such as topics of writing and reading materials) are evident in the literacy events?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oct (2 weeks)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What cultural values are students expected to have as represented in the instructional materials?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oct (2 weeks)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus on teachers</th>
<th>What values and beliefs do teachers have regarding literacy?</th>
<th>Interviews with teachers, observation, analysis of instructional documents</th>
<th>Phase Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How do values represented in instruction reflect teachers’ values about literacy, as articulated in interviews?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nov (2 weeks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on students</td>
<td>What values and beliefs do students have regarding literacy?</td>
<td>Observation, student interviews, analysis of student documents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How do values represented in the instruction reflect students’ values about literacy?</td>
<td>Jan (3 weeks)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How do decisions students make during instruction reflect their own values relating to literacy?</td>
<td>Jan-Feb (2 weeks)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How do students negotiate teacher and district-imposed values that may not be their own?</td>
<td>Feb (2 weeks)</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nov (2 weeks)</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• How do decisions teachers make about instruction reflect their own values relating to literacy?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec (2 weeks)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How do teachers negotiate district-imposed values?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec (1 week)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How do teachers address students’ values?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Sample of two week cycle of observation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donna: 9-12</td>
<td>Susan: 9-11:30</td>
<td>Donna: 9-12</td>
<td>Susan: 9-11:30</td>
<td>Analysis day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan: 10-12</td>
<td>Donna: 9-12</td>
<td>Susan: 9-11:30</td>
<td>Donna: 9-12</td>
<td>Analysis day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[^{17}\] Susan’s class tended to end between 11:00 and 11:30, although she sometimes ran longer. On Mondays, Susan’s class had library until 10, so those days generally ran until noon recess.
Appendix C

Questions for initial teacher interviews

These were the initial questions I asked, but during interviews, I also asked clarifying questions in response to teachers’ statements.

1. How do you define literacy?
2. How do you personally use reading and writing in your day-to-day activities?
3. What do you think are some of the most important aspects of reading and writing outside of work?
4. How do you teach literacy?
5. How does the way you teach literacy connect to how reading and writing are used in day-to-day life?
6. What makes a person literate?
7. At what point would you consider your students to be literate?
8. What do you know about how literacy is viewed in your students’ home cultures?
9. Describe for me your literacy curriculum.
10. What do you think about the curriculum?
11. Where does this curriculum come from? Who decides the curriculum?
12. What expectations are displayed in this curriculum?
13. What kind of choices do students have in the classroom?
14. What kind of choices do you have in the classroom?
15. Can you describe your classroom’s social dynamic?
Appendix D

Mid-research teacher interview questions

Some of these questions varied by teacher, based on classroom observations and what we had and had not discussed previously.

Questions for both teachers

1. How do you know you’ve covered something adequately?
2. What do you do if you haven’t?
3. How does that affect the pacing?
4. Why do you change seats on occasion?
5. How do you feel about the testing you’re doing right now?
6. How did you make the decision to do these activities for this week?
7. How do you manage the interruptions in instruction and pacing—testing, fire drills, picture days, holidays, etc.
8. How do you think students perceive literacy?
9. What are students’ family lives like?
10. What are students’ family lives like relating to literacy? –how do they use or think about reading and writing? What do students’ families think of school in general?
11. How do you address that?
12. How do students’ backgrounds compare to the lives of the characters in the stories in the curriculum?
13. How do you think students react when there are differences in the lives of the children in the stories and their lives?

14. What can you tell me about _________________ (this is the part of the interview when I asked the teachers about each of the focal students).

Questions just for Donna

1. Is there anything in the prescribed curriculum that you don’t cover?

2. Susan told me there are only 30 weeks in the curriculum, which is fewer weeks than in the school year. How do you account for that?

3. Yesterday you told the students everyone can do the work given to them. Do you think they can all do it by themselves?

Questions just for Susan

1. Describe your experiences learning to read

2. How does that compare to how you were taught to teach?

3. How would you describe your teaching philosophy now?

4. I noticed I don’t see you do vocabulary that often as it’s described in the curriculum. How do you teach vocabulary?
Appendix E

Initial student interview questions

1. What does it mean to be able to read?
2. How do you know you’re a good reader?
3. How do you know you’re a good writer?
4. What kind of things do you read and write in school?
5. What kind of things do you read and write at home?
6. Tell me what happens when you learn to read and write.
7. What kinds of things do you read and write in school?
8. What happens in reading time?
9. What kind of things do you read and write at home?
10. What kind of things do your parents read and write?
11. Are there some things that are good or bad to read and write?
12. What do you think about the things you do in reading time?
13. What kind of things are you allowed to choose here at school? In reading time?
14. What do you think about the stories you read in school? Are they like you?
15. (for students who attend tutoring) Do you like going to tutoring? Why/why not?
16. How do you feel missing some of class to go to tutoring?
Appendix F

Final student interview questions

1. What does it mean to help someone?
2. Are there good ways to help?
3. Are there bad ways to help?
4. What do you do when something is hard to read or write?
5. What do you think about the testing you had to do?
6. Why do you think you had to do that?
7. Last month you guys read a lot about Martin Luther King, Jr., the Civil Rights time and lots of famous African Americans. What do you think about that?
8. Why do you think you read about those people?
9. This is the table of contents of one of your Story Town books. I’d like you to look through it and think about the stories you’ve read. What story did you like the most? Why is it your favorite?
10. What story do you not like? Why don’t you like it?
11. What story do you think is most like your life? Why?
12. What one do you think is least like you? Why?

For the students in Donna’s class

13. Do you like the worksheets you do in reading time? Why/why not?
14. You guys have been in “boot camp” for a while. How did you feel when you were in it?
15. Why were you guys in it?
16. How do you feel now that you’re out?
Appendix G

Initial code list

These are the initial codes I assigned from the analysis of the curriculum, with examples from the texts.

Appropriateness of text: purpose for writing; appropriate venues for text; importance of text; repetition of text;

Choice: choice of writing topic, choice of text;

Culture: names associated with different cultures/languages; accepted nonverbal communication;

Definition of reading: reader behavior;

Group versus individual work: personal responsibility; group collaboration; responsibility to others;

Meaning: what is and is not meaningful;

Scripted: possible answers provided for subjective questions

Standardization

Text to image connection: use of images; interpreting pictures;

Text format: graphic organizers; charts; semantic webs;

Values: good qualities (careful reader, do something nice, helpful, kind, caring, friendliness)
Appendix H

Final code list

The first column is the list of the codes I assigned to observations. The second column is the list of the most prominent, which were the result of narrowing my focus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority of text</th>
<th>Authority of text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choice</td>
<td>Behavior expectation</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Choice</td>
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<td>Cultural expectation</td>
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<tr>
<td>expectations</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural/social</td>
<td>Outside authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>expectations</td>
<td>Ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Reading behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expectations</td>
<td>Reading expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literary events</td>
<td>Social behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td>Centers</td>
<td>Text creation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>Text format</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>Use of text</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics/spelling</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry</td>
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<td>Question of the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading event</td>
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<tr>
<td>Small group</td>
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<td>Transition</td>
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<td>Vocabulary</td>
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<td>Worksheets</td>
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<td>Meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Misbehavior</td>
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<td>Ownership of text</td>
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<tr>
<td>others</td>
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<td>Tutoring time</td>
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Appendix I

Teacher Consent Form
The Ohio State University Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Cultural undertones of elementary school literacy instruction
Researcher: Katrina F. Cook

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.

Your participation is voluntary.
Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to understand the cultural beliefs that exist within elementary reading and writing instruction. This study will involve trying to understand how culture influences how children are taught reading and writing.

Procedures/Tasks:
Observation: The researcher will observe classroom time during the literacy instructional block two or three days a week.
Recording: With permission, observations will be video or audio-taped. The researcher will also take notes of observations and make copies of curriculum materials to analyze.
Interviews: The researcher will interview teachers and some students. These interviews will be audio-taped and later transcribed.
Document collection: Curriculum materials will be copied and analyzed. Throughout the observation time, the researcher will also collect student work, with student and parental permission.

Duration:
Observations will take place for about two hours at a time, two to three days a week. The study will last from six to twelve months. Interviews will last from 30-60 minutes, although the participant may choose to end it at any time.

You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University.
Risks and Benefits:
Benefits: Teachers may develop a deeper awareness of how their cultural understandings play out in the classroom. Schools are becoming increasingly diverse and teachers and administrators are sometimes at a loss to how to address cultural differences. In addition low literacy rates are a major concern in today’s schools. Results of this study can better inform schools on how literacy instruction is linked to cultural beliefs.

Risks: Participants may become uncomfortable with interview questions about cultural beliefs, either because they are highly personal or difficult to answer. Children who feel marginalized may be unwilling to speak negatively about their teacher or learning environment for fear of reprisal.

Minimization of risks: All responses will be kept confidential and will not be shared with other participants. When reported, identifying information will not be included. In addition, participants are not required to answer any questions and may end interviews at any time. The researcher will ask permission before copying any documents or student work.

Confidentiality:

Efforts will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):
- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;
- The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.

Incentives:
No incentives are being offered for participating in this study.

Participant Rights:

You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to
applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights
and welfare of participants in research.

Contacts and Questions:
For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Katrina Cook (614-
915-3390).

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related
concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact
Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

If you are injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-
related injury, you may contact Katrina Cook (614-915-3390).
Signing the consent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

Please check ALL boxes that apply. I give my consent to

☐ Have my classroom observed for a designated amount of time
☐ Have my statements recorded during interviews
☐ Have my statements recorded during teaching in notes by the researcher
☐ Have my statements audio-recorded during teaching and have my voice used in academic presentations and my words used in academic writing
☐ Be videotaped and have my voice and image used in academic presentations and my words used in academic writing
☐ have my picture taken to have my image used in academic presentations and in academic writing.
☐ have samples of my written or otherwise created work to be collected and used in academic presentations or writing.

Printed name of subject

Signature of subject

Date and time

AM/PM

Investigator/Research Staff

I have explained the research to the participant or his/her representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

Printed name of person obtaining consent

Signature of person obtaining consent

Date and time

AM/PM

Page 4 of 4

Form date: 12/15/05
Appendix J

Parent Letter and permission form

Dear Parents,

Throughout this school year, I will be conducting a research study in your child’s class. This study is focused on the cultural nature of reading and writing instruction and in it I will be examining participants’ beliefs and understandings about the purpose of reading and writing in their own cultures and in the school culture.

To do this, I will spend time in your child’s classroom two to three times a week, observing the reading and writing instruction block. I will be taking notes on interactions between students and teachers and how print is used. If permission is granted, I will be recording these interactions with video and/or audio recorders. Your child will only be recorded with your permission.

In addition to observing interactions, I will also be making copies of classroom documents, including the teacher’s lesson plans and student work. I will only be collecting documents from students who have, along with their parents, granted permission. Students will always be free to refuse to allow me to copy their work.

In order to fully understand students’ and teachers’ understandings of what goes on in the classroom, I will be interviewing the teacher and select students. Partway through the study I will be selecting a few students for more focused attention and interviews. I will be selecting a diverse sample of students in order to understand the various perspectives students bring to the classroom. I will only be choosing students for whom permission has already been granted.

Students and parents are always free to opt out of the study at any time with no penalties. Your child will not miss out on any instructional time or educational benefits. In addition to seeking parental permission, at the start of the study I will be requesting verbal assent from your child.

Attached is the parent permission form. I would appreciate it if you would read it carefully and return the last two pages to me promptly. If you have any questions, feel free to call me at (614) 915-3390. I would be happy to discuss this with you either over the phone or in person.

Sincerely,

Katrina Cook

Ph.D. candidate
School of Teaching and Learning
College of Education and Human Ecology
The Ohio State University
The Ohio State University Parental Permission
For Child’s Participation in Research

Study Title: Cultural undertones of elementary school literacy instruction

Researcher: Katrina F. Cook

This is a parental permission form for research participation. It contains important
information about this study and what to expect if you permit your child to participate.

Your child’s participation is voluntary.

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to discuss the study with your friends and
family and to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to permit your child
to participate. If you permit your child to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and
will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to understand the cultural beliefs that exist within elementary
reading and writing instruction. This study will involve trying to understand how culture
influences how children are taught reading and writing.

Procedures/Tasks:
Observation: The researcher will observe classroom time during the literacy instructional
block two or three days a week.
Recording: With permission, observations will be video or audio-taped. Pursuant to
Columbus City Schools guidelines, students will be recorded only if all parents and students
agree. The researcher will also take notes of observations and make copies of curriculum
materials to analyze.
Interviews: The researcher will interview teachers and select students, whose parents will be
contacted at a later date. These interviews will be audio-taped and later transcribed.
Document collection: Curriculum materials will be copied and analyzed. Throughout the
observation time, the researcher will also collect student work, with student and parental
permission.

Duration:
Observations will take place for about two hours at a time, two to three days a week. The
study will last from six to twelve months. Interviews will last from 30-60 minutes, although
the participant may choose to end it at any time.
Your child may leave the study at any time. If you or your child decides to stop participation in the study, there will be no penalty and neither you nor your child will lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University.

Risks and Benefits:
Benefits: Students may develop a deeper awareness of how their cultural understandings play out in the classroom. Schools are becoming increasingly diverse and teachers and administrators are sometimes at a loss to how to address cultural differences. In addition low literacy rates are a major concern in today’s schools. Results of this study can better inform schools on how literacy instruction is linked to cultural beliefs.

Risks: Participants may become uncomfortable with interview questions about cultural beliefs, either because they are highly personal or difficult to answer. Children who feel marginalized may be unwilling to speak negatively about their teacher or learning environment for fear of reprisal.

Minimization of risks: All responses will be kept confidential and will not be shared with other participants. When reported, identifying information will not be included. In addition, participants are not required to answer any questions and may end interviews at any time. The researcher will ask permission before copying any documents or student work.

Confidentiality:
Efforts will be made to keep your child’s study-related information confidential. Electronic data will be stored on the researcher’s computer and be password protected. Physical copies of the data will be stored at the researcher’s residence. Only she will have access to the information. All identifiers on documents will be removed.

However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your child’s participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your child’s records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):
- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;
- The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.

Incentives:
No incentives are being offered for participating in this study.

Participant Rights:
You or your child may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you or your child is a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

If you and your child choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights your child may have as a participant in this study.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Contacts and Questions:
For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Katrina Cook (614-915-3390).
For questions about your child’s rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

If your child is injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, you may contact Katrina Cook (614-915-3390).
Signing the parental permission form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to provide permission for my child to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to permit my child to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

Please check ALL boxes that apply

☐ Have my child observed during class time by the researcher
☐ Have my child’s statements recorded during class time in notes by the researcher
☐ Have my child’s statements audio-recorded during class time and have his/her voice used in academic presentations and his/her words used in academic writing
☐ Have my child to be videotaped and have his/her voice and image used in academic presentations and his/her words used in academic writing
☐ Have my child’s picture taken to have his/her image used in academic presentations and in academic writing.
☐ Have samples of my child’s written or otherwise created work to be collected and used in academic presentations or writing.

Printed name of subject

Printed name of person authorized to provide permission for subject

Signature of person authorized to provide permission for subject

Date and time

Relationship to the subject

Consent to video record

I voluntarily agree to allow myself/my child to be videotaped. I am aware that the recordings will be used only for educational purposes.

Printed name of subject

Signature of subject

Date and time

Printed name of person authorized to consent for subject (when applicable)

Signature of person authorized to consent for subject (when applicable)

Date and time

Relationship to the subject

Page 4 of 5

Form date: 12/15/05
Consent to audio record

I voluntarily agree to allow myself/my child to be audio-taped. I am aware that the recordings will be used only for educational purposes.

Printed name of subject __________________________ Signature of subject __________________________ AM/PM
Date and time __________________________

Printed name of person authorized to consent for subject __________________________ Signature of person authorized to consent for subject __________________________ AM/PM
(when applicable) __________________________ (when applicable) __________________________

Relationship to the subject __________________________ Date and time __________________________ AM/PM

Investigator/Research Staff

I have explained the research to the participant or his/her representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

Printed name of person obtaining consent __________________________ Signature of person obtaining consent __________________________ AM/PM
Date and time __________________________
Appendix K

Student verbal assent script
The Ohio State University Assent to Participate in Research
Verbal Assent Script

Study Title: Cultural undertones of elementary school literacy instruction

Researcher: Katrina F. Cook

Good morning. My name is Mrs. Cook. I’m going to be spending some time in your classroom this year.

I want to find out how you’re being taught to read and write. I’m going to be trying to find out what you’re supposed to do when you learn to read and write and what you think about how you are taught to read and write and how you learn.

For most of the year, I’m going to be spending some time watching what happens in class during reading time.

I am going to ask each of you if you want help me with this. If you do, sometimes I might ask to borrow work you have done. I might also ask what you’re thinking or make time to talk to you. Any time you want to say no, you’re allowed and won’t get into any trouble.

When I ask you if you want to help me with this, say “yes.” If you don’t want to, say “no.” Remember, you can always change your mind later.

Does anyone have any questions?

Do you want to help me with this?
Appendix L

Sample of the school pacing guide

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mon</th>
<th>Wed</th>
<th>Thu</th>
<th>Fri</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gr. K-6</td>
<td>Lesson 1 - Day 3</td>
<td>Grade 4 Writing Simulation</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gr. K-6</td>
<td>Lesson 2 - Day 1</td>
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</tr>
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**LANGUAGE ARTS**

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Appendix M

Sample week from the curriculum

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<th>Day 1</th>
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<tr>
<td>What is your favorite story? Tell why.</td>
<td>Which do you like to read more—stories or poems? Tell why.</td>
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<tr>
<td>READ ALOUD, p. T29</td>
<td>READ ALOUD, p. T41</td>
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<tr>
<td>WORD WALL, p. T29</td>
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**Word Work**

- **Phonics**, p. T30
  - Introduce: Short Vowels /i/ (a/i) /e/ /u/ /  
- **SPELLING**, p. T31
  - Pretest: Bag, big, fin, ran, has, fill, sat, list, sit, bag, win

**Skills and Strategies**

- **Reading**, p. T34
  - Introduce: Characters
- **LISTENING COMPREHENSION**, p. T36
  - Read-Aloud: “Wolf!”
- **Fluency**, p. T36
  - Focus: Accuracy
- **BUILD ROBUST VOCABULARY**, p. T37
  - Words From the Read-Aloud

**Step 2: Small Groups**

**Grammar**, p. T38
- Introduce: Sentences

**Daily Proofreading**
- darrin likes to read (Darrin, read.)

**Writing**, p. T39
- Introduce: Sentences About a Picture

**Writing Prompt:** Draw and write about something you did at school today.

**Step 3: Whole Group**

**Grammar**, p. T62
- Review: Sentences

**Daily Proofreading**
- James likes to read (James, read.)

**Writing**, p. T63
- Review: Sentences About a Picture

**Writing Prompt:** Write about what you are learning.
Appendix N

Sample curriculum instructional event

**Objective**
- To recognize that statements tell something and questions ask something

**Daily Proofreading**
- Shannon read a book about frogs (Shannon, frogs)

**Teach/Model**

**INTRODUCE STATEMENTS AND QUESTIONS**
- Explain that a statement is a sentence that tells something and ends with a period. Review that a question is a sentence that asks something and ends with a question mark.

Write these sentences on the board from "Friend Frog" (Read-Aloud Anthology, p. 8 and p. 11):

- Field Mouse looked at Frog.
  - How did you know to warn me?

Read aloud the first sentence. Explain that this sentence is a statement because it tells something. Ask: **Who does it tell about**? (Field Mouse) **What happened?** (looked at Frog)

Read aloud the second sentence. Explain that in this sentence, Frog asks how Field Mouse knew to warn him. Direct children's attention to the word how, and point out that it is a clue that the sentence is a question. Point out the end punctuation as well.

**Guided Practice**

**IDENTIFY STATEMENTS AND QUESTIONS**
- Display Transparency LAS. Read the first sentence together. Clue from children that it is a statement because it asks something.
  - Read the next sentence together. Help children identify it as a statement because it tells something. Continue with the next pair, eliciting responses from volunteers.

**Practice/Apply**

**IDENTIFY STATEMENTS AND QUESTIONS**
- Have children read sentences 3 and 6 and explain what each sentence is and how they know this.