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Literature group discussions in elementary classrooms: Case studies of three teachers and their students

Allen, Shelley Hooper, Ph.D.
The Ohio State University, 1994

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LITERATURE GROUP DISCUSSIONS IN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS: CASE STUDIES OF THREE TEACHERS AND THEIR STUDENTS

DISSERTATION

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

By

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* * * * *

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To my husband
Mark
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Shuttling talk from text, to social reality, to personal experience affirms literature's potential as a window on the world; it is talk that bridges the connections between literature and life. (Hynds, 1990, p. 173)

Situating the Research Problem

An evident trend in elementary schools is toward literature-based reading curricula. Many educators, researchers, and theorists in the field of reading support the use of trade books rather than basal readers in the classroom to foster children's literacy development. Furthermore, giving students the opportunity to talk about the literary texts they are reading in supportive, collaborative contexts is widely endorsed. Indeed, an increasingly popular practice within literature-based programs is the use of teacher- or student-led small group discussions of literature.

Broadly defined, literature-based teaching and learning consists of instructional practices and student activities that involve the use unedited texts such as novels, poems, and informational books (Zarillo, 1989). Educators and researchers alike argue that wide reading and in-depth reading of literature (a) fosters children's interest in books (Galda
& Cullinan, 1991; Huck, 1990; Tunnell & Jacobs, 1989); (b) informs, challenges, and expands readers' imaginations (Huck, 1990; Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1993); (c) facilitates children's vocabulary, syntax, and comprehension development (Cullinan, 1989; Galda & Cullinan, 1991; Huck et al., 1993); and (d) provides models of written language that young readers incorporate into their own writing repertoires (Cullinan, 1989; Galda & Cullinan, 1991; Huck et al., 1993; Peterson & Eeds, 1990). Within the context of endorsements for literature use in the classroom, both reader-oriented views of literature teaching and literary theories such as Louise Rosenblatt's notion of reading as a transaction are often cited. Central to these views and theories is the recognition that the reader is an active maker of meaning whose literary understandings are worthy of expression and consideration in the classroom.

Using literature in the elementary classroom has thus become a commonly accepted practice; however, ways to use it effectively and the principles that guide its use are less widely agreed upon, or understood. Many educational researchers argue that literature teaching, at both elementary and secondary levels, is not guided by a cohesive theoretical framework (Applebee, 1990; Langer, 1990; Marshall, 1993; Walmsley, 1992; Walmsley & Walp, 1989; Zancanella, 1991; Zarillo, 1991). Traditional text-centered approaches and more recent reader-oriented views collide in the classroom as teachers receive and send mixed signals about the purposes and promises of teaching with literature. At times it appears that the active role of the learner in
constructing meanings from texts is more often acknowledged in theory than in practice (see Marshall, 1989; Wollman-Bonilla, 1991).

In elementary schools, the challenges of making the transition from basals to trade books as the core materials of a reading program are many (Jongsma, 1993; Scharer, 1992). Teachers new to literature-based reading instruction are faced with learning more about children's literature, developing organizational strategies for its use, and determining how to best assess students' reading progress given the new materials and approaches (Scharer, 1992). Furthermore, many differing definitions of "literature-based reading" exist (Hiebert & Colt, 1989; Huck, 1992; Zarillo, 1989).

Given the apparent conflicts in the field, it is not surprising that recent studies indicate that teachers lack a sound philosophy to guide their approaches to literature use in the classroom (Walmsley & Walp, 1989; Zancanella, 1991). Yet there is still little empirical evidence to document how elementary teachers using literature-based approaches are actually conceptualizing and practicing those approaches (see Hade, 1989; Scharer, 1992). Clearly, more studies which provide insights into the current status of literature use in the classroom are needed. As Zarillo (1989) asserts, "researchers can help teachers by investigating specific teaching techniques in literature-based programs" (p. 28).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This study was devised to explore three teachers' practices and perspectives concerning one particular "teaching technique" within
literature-based programs -- the use of teacher-led small group discussions of literature. Specifically, the purpose of the study was to describe and analyze three upper elementary teachers' (grades 4 and 5) observed practices and stated perspectives regarding small group discussions of literature in their classrooms. One discussion group per classroom was followed as participants read and discussed one children's chapter book/novel from beginning to end. Teacher and student patterns of talk in the context of literature group discussions were of primary interest. Furthermore, the researcher's intention was to investigate how the discussion strategies of the three teachers were related to the nature of students' talk within the groups and to the students' perspectives on the groups. Finally, the study was designed to explore relationships between the observed practices and the stated perspectives of the three teachers regarding their use of literature groups.

The researcher believed that the role(s) played by the teachers in literature group meetings would influence students' patterns of talk during the discussions and students' perspectives on the discussions. It also seemed reasonable to expect that the teachers' perspectives on the purposes and functions of literature discussion groups in the classroom would influence how the teachers structured the groups and how they talked with students in those groups.

The research thus addressed the following questions:

1. (a) What are the discussion strategies used by each of the three teachers during literature discussion group sessions with students?
(b) What are the patterns of student talk during small group discussions of literature with each of the three teachers?
(c) How are the discussion strategies of the three teachers related to the nature of the students' talk within the groups?
Specifically, for questions 1a., 1b., and 1c., the researcher analyzed the content and quantity of teacher talk and student talk within the discussion groups.

2. (a) What are the three teachers' perspectives on the purposes and functions of literature discussion groups in their classrooms?
(b) What are the three teachers' perspectives on the focal group discussions observed for this study?

3. What are the relationships between the stated perspectives and the observed practices of the three teachers during literature group discussions?

4. What are the student participants' perspectives on the purposes and functions of the literature groups?

Given the researcher's intention to observe and describe how teachers carried out literature group discussions in naturally-occurring classroom settings, qualitative methods were best suited to the purposes of this study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Participant observation, interviews with teachers and students, audiotaping of focal group discussions, and collection of relevant documents were thus the primary data-gathering techniques.
Relevance of the Problem

Literature-based language arts programs are becoming increasingly prevalent in elementary schools. "Real" books rather than basal readers are the materials of choice for furthering children's literacy learning (Galda & Cullinan, 1991; Huck, 1977, 1990; Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1993; Tunnell & Jacobs, 1989). Furthermore, educational researchers who advocate literature-based approaches to teaching have recommended the inclusion of literature discussion groups as one component of those programs (Cullinan, 1989; Huck et al., 1993). In fact, Peterson and Eeds (1990), Pierce and Gilles (1993), and Short and Pierce (1990) have produced teacher-oriented books that specifically address the topic of literature discussion groups in elementary classrooms. In these publications, it is argued that engaging students in conversations about children's books in small group situations is an effective means of fostering and enhancing their literary understandings. Research on children's responses to literature in classroom settings supports this premise, indicating that through talk about literature with others, children negotiate meanings, consider audience, and reveal their understandings (Hepler & Hickman, 1982).

It seems reasonable to suggest that small group settings, as opposed to whole class contexts, can provide children with more opportunities to actively participate in dialogues that expand and refine their understandings of a book. There are fewer participants with whom to share to floor in these more intimate groups. Additionally, when the teacher participates s/he has the chance to learn more about
individual students' understandings than whole class discussions typically permit. Clearly the teacher's role as a member of the group will influence the type of interactions that emerge in these contexts. Indeed, a related body of research on story-time interactions between children and adults at home and in school indicates that the adult reader's role may be highly significant in promoting children's developing responses to literature (Martinez & Roser, 1991).

Analysis of Vygotsky's work suggests that engaging in dialogues with more capable others is crucial to children's learning. Children construct their understandings of the world in a social context; their speech-for-others gradually develops into speech-for-self, which can be used as a tool for reflecting on and transforming their thinking (Vygotsky, 1986). In collaborative efforts with adults or more capable peers, children are able to organize their thinking and to accomplish tasks that they are not yet able to do alone (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978). In short, children are active makers of meaning who use oral language to communicate and to learn (Barnes, 1976; Wells, 1986). Language development authorities have attested the significance of providing children with opportunities to learn through talk (Barnes, 1990; Cazden, 1988; Morrow, 1993; Pinnell & Jaggar, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Wells, 1986, 1990). Furthermore, current language research confirms that oral communication plays an important role in children's cognitive and social development (Pinnell & Jaggar, 1991, p. 697).

In spite of the key role played by speech in children's learning, many teachers rarely enable students to use oral language as a means of developing their thinking. These teachers often subscribe to a
"transmission view" of education (Barnes, 1976; Wells, 1986). The transmission view suggests that the teacher's role is to distribute knowledge and that the student's role is to passively receive it. Teachers who accept this traditional notion of teaching and learning tend to dominate talk in classrooms, imposing their understandings of school concepts on students rather than negotiating meanings with them in collaborative dialogues (Barnes, 1976; Wells, 1986). It appears that the transmission view also influences how literature is used in elementary classrooms. Many elementary teachers approach the reading of literature as a quest for the "correct" interpretation of texts, and they use an "inquisition mode" to assess students' understandings of books (Eeds & Wells, 1989).

In a few recent "intervention" studies (Durkin, 1991), researchers have explored how teachers can engage students in interactive literary dialogues rather than one-sided inquisitions through the implementation of literature discussion groups (Crouse, 1987; Eeds & Wells, 1989; O'Flahavan, Stein, Wiencek, & Marks, 1992). In addition, a few teacher-as-researcher investigations at the elementary level have emerged on the topic of literature discussions involving teachers and students in small groups (Anzul, 1988, 1993; Crawford & Hoopingarner, 1993; Paille, 1991). In general, findings from both sets of studies reveal that teachers who participated in group discussions in facilitative rather than dominant roles fostered students' literary meaning making in collaborative contexts. In these contexts students interacted with each other as well as with the teacher to express and enrich their literary understandings. Still, further inquiry into the relevant
dimensions of the teacher's role in cultivating students' literary responses during discussions is needed (Martinez & Roser, 1991; Rosenblatt, 1985).

Intervention studies such as those cited above provide significant evidence about the potential benefits of small group discussions of literature in terms of student learning; however, more descriptive studies that illuminate how elementary teachers currently translate theory into practice regarding literature discussion groups are also necessary. Such studies are not common. In particular, literature discussion group research undertaken from the perspective of researchers acting as non-intervening participant observers in naturally-occurring elementary classroom environments is rare (see Wollman-Bonilla, 1991). Educators can only make informed decisions about strategies to improve literature-based teaching practices, including the practice of involving students in small group discussions of literature, once there is a clearer picture of the current status of literature use in elementary classrooms.

Summary

This study was undertaken to inform teaching practices by using qualitative methods to systematically describe and analyze three teachers' strategies for interacting with students during small group discussions of literature. Furthermore, the study was designed to investigate relationships between the three teachers' observed practices, their stated perspectives, and patterns of student talk in
literature group discussions. It was also expected that the research would highlight techniques that promoted or discouraged collaborative dialogues among participants during literary discussions. A descriptive, observational study of teachers' practices and perspectives regarding literature discussion groups contributes to the body of knowledge on the current uses of literature in elementary classrooms. Educators need such information in order to make informed decisions about strategies for improving literature-based teaching approaches. In the next chapter, a review of relevant literature related to this study is presented.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The frameworks we set up for talk in the classroom tend to be restrictive: we expect too little from the students, take too much on ourselves. In this way we lose valuable opportunities to find out what purposes and possibilities students bring to the classroom, where they need help -- and where they could offer guidance to us as their teachers. We have to learn how to take part in their group discussions without robbing them of the speaking initiative. What they certainly need is the opportunity to learn from their own attempts at putting ideas into words through talk with their peers. (Britton, 1993, pp. 297-298)

A social constructivist view of learning provided the conceptual framework for this study of teacher-led small group discussions of literature. Furthermore, research and theories on learning through language, classroom discourse, and reader response informed the inquiry. In particular, this chapter includes discussion of the following: the developmental theory of learning proposed by Lev Vygotsky, studies of patterns of talk in classrooms, and Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory of the process of reading literature. Furthermore, a critical review of previous research on small group discussions of literature, particularly at the elementary level, is presented. The review highlights the social nature of talk as a potential means of enhancing students' literary understandings. The role of the teacher in creating the context
for discussion and in participating in group meetings is also given special attention.

A Social Constructivist View of Learning

It is now widely accepted among literacy researchers that children are active makers of meaning; they learn by reconstructing prior knowledge and experiences in light of new information, largely through talk with others (Barnes, 1976, 1990; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Wells, 1986). Participation in dialogues, defined as "collaborative interaction[s] carried out through language," with more capable persons is viewed as a primary means of fostering children's learning (Genishi, McCarrier, & Nussbaum, 1988, p. 183). With regard to learning to read and write, Wells (1990) stresses "the importance of their [children's] participation in joint literacy events in which the significance of the literate behavior is made overt through talk. It is in such verbally mediated assisted performance -- in talk about text -- that literacy is learned and taught" (p. 381, emphasis in the original). In an extensive review of research on children's oral language development, Pinnell and Jaggar (1991) conclude that English language-arts curricula should ensure that students have many opportunities to use talk in a variety of meaningful social situations.

Researchers and theorists speaking of literature use at the elementary level also assert that children's literacy learning takes place in interactive social contexts (Galda & Cullinan, 1991; Hepler & Hickman, 1982). Similarly, recent discussions of literature teaching at the
secondary level support the notion that students make meaning through language use in interactive contexts (Newell & Durst, 1993). Straw (1990) maintains that reading and literature are currently being conceptualized as interaction and transaction and that "implicit in these new notions of reading is the idea of the social construction of knowledge and the role of talk in creating and consolidating meaning" (p. 131).

Providing students with opportunities to engage in dialogues about the literary texts they read is thus a teaching practice supported by a social constructivist perspective. This perspective is complemented by Rosenblatt's transactional theory of the literary reading process (1978, 1983, 1985). Rosenblatt emphasizes the active role of the reader in evoking a literary work and cites the importance of readers sharing their individual responses with others. As she states, "just as language is socially developed and individually internalized, so the evocation of a literary work of art must be seen both in its social and its personal aspects" (1985, p. 48).

How literature discussions are actually enacted in the classroom, particularly in small group contexts at the elementary level, is the focus of this study, and previous research on the topic is reviewed later in this chapter. First, a broader perspective on the social nature of language and learning is provided. Specifically, Vygotsky's developmental theory of learning, which supports a view of children as actively constructing knowledge through social interactions, is discussed in the next section.
Vygotskian Perspectives on Language and Learning

The Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky proposed a developmental theory of learning (1978, 1986). He argued that human consciousness has social origins and that children's learning and development take place in a social context. As he stated, "every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological). . . . All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57, emphasis in the original). Thus, children learn and internalize higher mental functions by interacting with others, transforming intermental processes into intramental processes.

Vygotsky (1978) asserted that cultural signs, such as language, and tools mediate human higher psychological functions. Through language humans represent, interpret, and learn from their experiences (Britton, 1970). Indeed, "the child's intellectual growth is contingent on his mastering the social means of thought, that is, language" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 94). As Tharp and Gallimore (1988) explain, children develop the "cognitive and communicative tools of their culture" through daily, goal-directed interactions with caregivers (p. 27).

More specifically, Vygotsky (1978) described children's development as occurring at two levels: the "actual" level and the "potential" level. The actual level consists of abilities that the child has mastered; that is, mental processes that the child can perform without help from others. In contrast, the potential level consists of mental
functions that the child can perform only with the assistance of an adult or a more capable peer. Vygotsky (1978, 1986) characterized the span between the child's actual and potential levels of development as the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD). The zone of proximal development "is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86, emphasis in the original). Children learn by engaging in collaborative dialogues with more capable others in their ZPDs. As Vygotsky (1978) stated, "what a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow" (p. 87). Thus, in the ZPD learning precedes development.

Language acquisition was viewed by Vygotsky (1978) as the paradigm case for understanding the relationship between children's learning and development. Children's language acquisition (i.e., oral language/speech development) also provides a clear example of how external, social functions are internalized by the child. From their first days of life, speech for children is social; language serves a communicative function (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). Then, at a certain stage in their development, children's social speech divides into communicative speech and "egocentric speech" (Vygotsky, 1986). Vygotsky maintained that egocentric speech is vocalized and appears social, but its function is to help the child organize, plan, and carry out his actions. In experiments with preschoolers, Vygotsky (1978, 1986) found that as the children were confronted with increasingly difficult
problems to solve -- without assistance -- their use of egocentric speech increased. Thus, he concluded that at this stage in their development the children were using vocalized speech for themselves to help them think.

According to Vygotsky (1986), egocentric speech marks the transitional stage between external, social speech for others and voiceless, "inner speech" for oneself. Inner speech denotes verbal thought; it is a higher psychological function because with it people use language, a culturally mediated activity, to refine, reflect on, and transform their thinking and actions. Therefore, children's speech-for-others gradually develops into speech-for-self as they construct their understandings of the world in a social context.

Building on Vygotsky's views on the social nature of children's learning, Bruner (1985, 1986) uses the metaphor "scaffolding" to describe how adults use language to interact with children in their zones of proximal development (ZPDs). For example, in mother-child interactions, such as naming objects in a picture book, the mother constructs formats, or scaffolds, that enable the child to do what he can to contribute to a speech event while the mother does the rest (Bruner, 1985, 1986; Ninio & Bruner, 1978). As the child displays more proficiency in his oral language abilities, the mother expects more of a contribution from him. In other words, the mother "raises the ante," progressing ahead of the child's development by helping him work in his ZPD (Bruner, 1985, 1986). Indeed, Vygotsky (1978, 1986) maintained that optimal learning and teaching take place in children's ZPDs, leading rather than following their development. Furthermore, it is through external, social
interactions with others that children exhibit their internal means of sense-making and reveal their ZPDs (Vygotsky, 1978).

Current language research supports Vygotsky's theories by confirming that oral communication plays a key role in children's cognitive and social development (Pinnell & Jaggar, 1991). For example, shared story reading experiences in the home are linked with children's literacy achievement in school (Heath, 1982b; Teale, 1984; Wells, 1986). Indeed, before they begin school many young children have listened to stories, learning about the "symbolic potential of language" and collaborating with caregivers to construct meanings from texts (Wells, 1986, p. 156). In his longitudinal Bristol study of children's language development at home and at school, Wells (1986) found that children often engaged in collaborative dialogues with caregivers in conjunction with purposeful activities. During these interactions adult and child used oral language to negotiate meaning and to achieve mutual understanding. Wells (1986) asserts that the adult's provision of support and feedback is crucial for fostering a child's attempts to communicate.

In terms of adult-child interactions at school, the child's unsystematized, everyday concepts meet the teacher's logical reasoning in the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1986). The result of this teacher-child cooperation is internalized by the child; intermental processes are transformed into intramental processes. Vygotsky referred mainly to dyadic interactions when he spoke of teaching and learning in the ZPD. In most classrooms, however, the ratio of one teacher to many students is not conducive to sustained one-on-one adult-child interactions. Research on the nature of talk in the classroom is discussed in the next section.
Classroom Discourse

In this section pertinent research on common and less common patterns of talk in school is discussed. Additionally, related research on typical patterns of talk about literature in the classroom is presented. The section concludes with a rationale for considering small group discussions of literature as one possible means of involving students in interactive talk about literary texts.

Patterns of Talk in School

Classroom discourse research has revealed that teachers tend to control the talk (Barnes, 1976; Cazden, 1986, 1988; Pinnell & Jaggar, 1991; Wells, 1986). During teacher-led lessons the most common pattern of talk is the initiate-respond-evaluate (IRE) sequence: teachers introduce topics and pose questions, students answer the questions, and teachers evaluate the students' responses (Bellack, Kliebard, Hyman, & Smith, 1966; Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1979; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). The teacher-led "recitation" is embedded in curriculum materials, such as teacher manuals (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Furthermore, the recitation enables teachers to maintain order in the classroom and to fulfill their responsibility as educators to evaluate students' learnings (Mehan, 1979).

Researchers focusing on the social dimension of language use in school assert that the teacher and students together construct classroom events, such as lessons (Bloome, Puro, & Theodorou, 1989; Green & Wallat, 1981; Mehan, 1979, 1980; Wallat & Green, 1979). Based on an ethnographic microanalysis of two kindergarten class meetings, Green
and Wallat (1981) describe instructional conversations as structured and directed by the teacher, who chooses the topic, accepts, rejects, or ignores student messages, and distributes student turns (p. 175). Student "breaks" or divergences from expected behavior (such as appropriate turn-taking) serve to highlight the social rules being constructed in various instructional contexts. Green and Wallat (1981) emphasize that the students and teacher act on each other's verbal and nonverbal messages, together forming social rules and contexts for instructional conversations.

Bloome et al. (1989) argue that classroom lessons are events co-constructed by teachers and students based on cultural meanings and values for education. For example, showing progress and moving through curricular material is a broad cultural expectation for classroom education in this country (Bloome et al., 1989). The researchers use the term "procedural display" to denote academic interactions that teachers and students count as carrying out, or moving through, a lesson. Procedural display is not synonymous with meaningful engagement in academic tasks, however. Bloome et al. (1989) found in their microethnographic analysis of two classroom lessons (grades 7 and 8) that teachers and students cooperatively used interactional strategies to successfully execute the lessons. What the participants' strategies did not do, however, was succeed in substantively engaging the students in the content of the lessons. Like the recitation pattern, procedural display gives the appearance of accomplishing academic tasks, but it may fail to actively involve students in the learning process.
Recent research has indicated that less common patterns of classroom discourse can actively engage students in meaningful learning interactions. For example, the Kamehameha Elementary Education Program's (KEEP) theory and practice of teaching and learning as "assisted performance" provides an example of a less teacher-dominated form of classroom talk (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Teaching as assisted performance builds on Vygotsky's ideas and involves helping students' performance through their ZPDs -- when their performance needs help -- in goal-directed, interactional contexts (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

Through joint enterprises with the teacher, students in KEEP make connections between new concepts and previous understandings. In these interactions the teacher is a conversation partner, helping the children work in their ZPDs and acting in a responsive rather than dominant role.

Similarly, Applebee and Langer (1983) use the term "instructional scaffolding" to describe teaching approaches that incorporate five natural language learning criteria: intentionality, appropriateness, structure, collaboration, and internalization. Instructional scaffolding involves (a) giving students purposeful tasks that build on their prior knowledge as a bridge to new learning, (b) using modeling and questioning to provide a structure within which students can approach the tasks, (c) responding to student efforts in a facilitative rather than evaluative manner, and (d) gradually withdrawing external support as students internalize the means of approaching and accomplishing the tasks.
Student-student interactions in the classroom can also reflect collaborative patterns of talk. For example, in student-only (ages 12 and 13) discussion groups centered around learning tasks, Barnes (1976) and Barnes and Todd (1977) found that some participants used an "exploratory" speech style. Exploratory talk was characterized by cooperative efforts to organize and extend ideas, to work through disagreements, and to consider possibilities. This collaborative, "open" communicative approach was used by the most successful groups. These students used talk to power their thinking and thus to take responsibility for their own learning. Similarly, Forman and Cazden (1985) observed elementary students engaging in peer collaboration and peer tutoring. In such peer contexts students took on the roles of teacher (e.g., formulating questions, verbalizing instructions), scaffolder, and/or conversation partner. The researchers noted that these roles challenged children to articulate academic tasks, to express and consider alternative viewpoints, and to coordinate their efforts through talk.

Unlike the collaborative communication styles discussed above, the more common patterns of classroom discourse, such as the recitation, have been characterized as reflecting a "transmission view" of education (Barnes, 1976; Wells, 1986). The transmission view defines specific roles for teachers and students. The teacher's role is to distribute knowledge and to evaluate students' learnings, and the student's role is to passively receive knowledge and to use language to present his learnings (Barnes, 1976). According to Langer (1984), transmission beliefs "govern educational interactions in America even at the university level" (p. 113).
Teachers who have a transmission view of teaching tend to show a "lack of reciprocity" in their interactions with students (Wells, 1986). In other words, during discussions/lessons teachers impose their adult understandings of a topic on students and fail to take into account, support, or build on students' perspectives on the topic (Barnes, 1976; Wells, 1986). In these situations students have little opportunity to use oral language to connect their everyday "action knowledge" with new "school knowledge" (Barnes, 1976) -- or to reveal their ZPDs. Barnes (1976) characterizes the talk of students in traditional teacher-led discussions as "final draft" and contrasts it with "exploratory speech" (p. 108). Learners use final draft talk to present their knowledge for the teacher's approval; conversely, learners use exploratory speech to collaboratively shape and share their understandings. Although children are active meaning makers capable of building on their prior knowledge through talk with others, opportunities to participate in collaborative dialogues in the classroom are often limited (Barnes, 1976; Wells, 1986).

Unspoken rules govern the communication system in the classroom and comprise the "hidden curriculum" of schooling (Barnes, 1976; Cazden, 1988). For example, research has shown that teachers implicitly expect, but do not explicitly teach students to talk in a certain manner during lessons/discussions (Cazden, 1988). The common "student-talk" register includes the following tacit rules: (a) do not share narratives of personal experiences during lessons, (b) answer questions at the appropriate time (such as during the "R" slot in IRE sequences), (c) contribute only relevant information (as defined by the teacher) during discussions, and (d) use standard syntax when speaking (Cazden, 1988).
These rules send students powerful messages about their role as learners and about what counts as legitimate knowledge in the classroom.

In summary, according to much of the research on classroom discourse, teacher-led lessons are often exercises in moving through academic content that do not actively involve students in meaningful talk about school concepts. Conversely, studies on less common teaching approaches, such as assisted performance teaching (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) and instructional scaffolding (Applebee & Langer, 1983) indicate that collaborative teacher-student interactions can engage students in more purposeful learning. Research on student-student interactions similarly reveals that children can collaboratively interact with peers to power their thinking and to expand their understandings. Taken together, these studies provide the impetus for further research on alternatives to the traditional recitation pattern of talk in school. In particular, more studies are needed to reveal specifically how teachers can create contexts for collaborative dialogues with and among students in their classrooms.

Talk About Literature in School

Traditional Teacher-Led Discussions

Just as it influences the nature of talk about other school topics, a transmission view of teaching apparently influences how literature is discussed in the classroom (Beach & Hynds, 1991). Specifically, discussions of a literary work are often led by the teacher, who asks students questions in order to elicit an agreed-upon or "correct"
interpretation (Applebee, 1990; Hynds, 1990; Langer, 1990b; Rogers, 1987). In many secondary schools the long-standing tradition of the New Critical approach to the teaching and learning of literature contributes to an emphasis on literary analysis and to whole class discussions which lead to a single acceptable interpretation (Applebee, 1990). At the elementary level too, Eeds and Wells (1989) refer to the common method of teaching literature as the "inquisition mode" (p. 4). Similarly, Edwards (1991) maintains that basal readers promote a recitation-type pattern of teacher-student interaction that does not encourage meaningful literary conversations.

In interviews with 74 personnel from six elementary schools, Walmsley and Walp (1989) found that although all of the teachers stressed the importance of literature in the curriculum, most of them who practiced guided/shared reading of literature with students did so for the purpose of teaching traditional, basal-like reading skills (such as vocabulary and comprehension). Helping students develop literary knowledge beyond basic story elements (such as plot, setting, and characters) was not a frequently articulated goal for guided readings. Furthermore, the researchers heard few indications that the teachers encouraged personal literary responses during guided reading activities.

Similarly, in his analysis of patterns of discourse during whole class discussions of literature in six secondary English classrooms, Marshall (1989) deduced that the primary role of students was to contribute to the teacher's development of an interpretation rather than to construct and support their own interpretations. Of note in Marshall's findings is that during interviews the teachers indicated that
they valued students' responses and wanted students to actively participate in the discussions. Conversely, the teachers also stated that their discussion role included keeping the talk "on track" and insuring that particular topics were addressed. Marshall's conclusions indicate that the teachers' perspectives and practices revealed a conflict between valuing genuine student response and transmitting particular literary knowledge during discussions of literature.

While Marshall's (1989) secondary level study included observation and analysis of discussions as well as interviews with participants, Walmsley and Walp's (1989) findings at the elementary level were based on interview and document analysis data only. Classroom observations of teachers and students engaged in naturally-occurring literature-related activities are needed to broaden the picture of elementary literature instruction provided by Walmsley and Walp.

**An Alternative Discussion Approach**

Clearly, traditional approaches to literature teaching, such as those described above, are at odds with Vygotskian theory and with a social constructivist perspective on learning. They are also at odds with reader-based views of literature reading and teaching. Reader-based views place value on students' personal responses to literature (Beach, 1993; Newell & Durst, 1993). As Rosenblatt (1991a) states:

Methods of teaching appropriate to the transmission of knowledge of the content or techniques of literary works are not primarily adapted to producing readers capable of evoking literary works for themselves, or of deriving the pleasures and insights claimed for literary study. If students are to learn to experience literature -- to
read aesthetically -- the need evidently is for different methods and a different educational climate from the traditional teacher-dominated explication of literary texts (p. 61).

At the elementary level, teacher-oriented publications written by renowned children's literature experts support giving substantial attention to students' personal responses to and interpretations of literature (Cullinan, 1989; Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1993). Galda (1988) emphasizes that the reader and the context as well as the text must be given due consideration by teachers. More specifically, a number of researchers and educators have suggested that collaborative, small group discussions of literature in particular are viable contexts for fostering elementary students' literary understandings (Anzul, 1988, 1993; Crawford & Hoopingarner, 1993; Crouse, 1987; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Keegan & Shrake, 1991; Klassen, 1993; Leal, 1993; Paille, 1991; Peterson & Eeds, 1990; Pierce, 1993; Raphael et al., 1992; Scott, 1992; Short, 1993; Urzua, 1992).

From a Vygotskian perspective, small group settings can enable the teacher to be more responsive to students' ZPDs, since s/he is dealing with a limited number of children rather than with the whole class. Additionally, compared to whole class contexts, small groups are more intimate environments; students tend to feel less intimidated and more willing to take risks (Barnes, 1976; Wells, 1986). In small groups students may have more opportunities to actively participate in a discussion, since there are fewer participants with whom to share the floor.

Literature as the topic of discussions has the potential to stimulate lively dialogue. As the embodiment of human experience, it often has
personally relevant, emotional content for readers (Rosenblatt, 1983). Quality literature entertains readers and educates them (Huck, 1977). Consequently, readers of literature may be moved to explore, communicate, and internalize intriguing ideas and attitudes. Huck (1990) maintains that literature has the power to (a) provide readers with vicarious experiences in a multitude of textual worlds, (b) give readers knowledge about their human history, (c) increase readers' social sensitivity when they identify with compelling characters who are different from themselves, (d) stretch readers' imaginations, and (e) transform their thinking. Furthermore, since each reader brings his unique life experiences to a text in order to construct meaning from it (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1983), when more than one person reads the same text, multiple interpretations are often the result. Small group discussions can be thus contexts in which readers share interpretations, negotiate meanings, and consider alternative perspectives.

In conclusion, small group discussions of literature appear to have the potential to expand and enrich students' personal literary understandings. This beneficial potential is supported by a convergence of social constructivist principles, Vygotskian learning theory, research on classroom discourse, reader-based views of literature reading, and the nature of literature itself. With regard to the use of literature in elementary classrooms, how are small group discussions of literary texts actually being implemented? What features of the teachers' role(s) in discussions can be identified as fostering or inhibiting students' literary understandings through social interactions? How does reader response theory, particularly Rosenblatt's (1978, 1983, 1985) transactional
approach, and reader response research inform an inquiry into literature discussions in elementary classrooms? These questions are addressed in the next section.

Small Group Discussions of Literature

Studies of small group discussions of literature, particularly at the elementary school level, are reviewed in this section. Many of the studies reflect reader-based views of literature teaching (e.g., Eeds & Wells, 1989; Paille, 1991; Raphael et al., 1992; Scott, 1992). In addition, some of the researchers cite Rosenblatt's perspectives on reading literature as providing a theoretical framework for their investigations (e.g., Anzul, 1988, 1993; Daniel, 1991; Eeds & Wells, 1989). Rosenblatt's (1978, 1983, 1985) transactional theory of literary reading, along with pertinent studies on reader response precede the review of discussion group research.

Reader Response

Reader response theories do not represent a unified perspective on the process of reading literature, but they do have in common a focus on how readers construct meanings from literary works (Athanases, 1993; Beach, 1993; Tompkins, 1980). These theories incorporate the assumption that the reader is an active player in the reading process rather than a passive recipient of textual input. Huck, Hepler, and Hickman (1993) define response to literature as follows:
Theoretically, *response* refers to what happens in the mind of the reader or listener as the story or poem unfolds. In this sense, response is personal and private, hidden from the world. In another sense, a *response* also refers to any outward sign of that inner activity, something said or done that reveals a reader's thoughts and feelings about literature (p. 54, emphasis in the original).

Conceptions of literature-based approaches to reading at the elementary level frequently incorporate the work of Louise Rosenblatt, a theorist associated with reader response perspectives (Eeds & Peterson, 1991; McGee, 1992; Zarillo, 1991). At the secondary level as well, Rosenblatt's work is acknowledged as providing a persuasive rationale for valuing students' responses to literature in the classroom (Applebee, 1990; Athanases, 1993). According to Farrell (1990), Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration*, first published in 1938, "has furnished the theoretical basis for research in the teaching and study of literature and has influenced how literature is taught in classrooms both here and abroad" (p. ix). Rosenblatt's (1978, 1983, 1985) transactional theory of the process of reading literature is summarized below.

**Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory**

Although Rosenblatt's theory is most often identified within the realm of reader response perspectives, Rosenblatt (1978, 1985, 1991a) emphasizes that the text as well as the reader contribute to the literary meaning making process. To Rosenblatt, reading is a transaction, a reciprocal process, between the reader and the text. The reader brings his past experiences and present feelings to the reading of the text, and
the text supplies cues which guide the reading. As Rosenblatt (1983) explains, "the literary work exists in the live circuit set up between reader and text: the reader infuses intellectual and emotional meanings into the pattern of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel his thoughts and feelings" (p. 25). Multiple interpretations of a literary work are thus possible given the unique nature of individual readers' transactions; however, some interpretations are more supported by elements in the text than others (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1985).

Rosenblatt (1978, 1985, 1991b) distinguishes between two key ways of reading texts, "efferent" and "aesthetic." The efferent stance involves reading for the purpose of taking information away from a text. The goal is to acquire information to be retained beyond the reading event. If a teacher asks students to record eight examples of metaphors as they read a short story, and the students approach their reading primarily as a hunt for the metaphors, they are reading efferently. Conversely, in the aesthetic transaction, "the reader's attention is centered on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 25, emphasis in the original). Readers taking an aesthetic stance toward a text are focusing on what they feel, think, and experience as they read. As they transact with the text, they evoke the literary work -- the poem, play, or story.

Efferent and aesthetic stances represent two end points on a continuum (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1985, 1991b). That is, a reading may be predominantly efferent or predominantly aesthetic, but elements of both stances may enter into a transaction. The text, the context, and the reader's previous experiences and current purposes all influence the
stance taken when reading. Furthermore, a reader may change stances during a reading. Rosenblatt (1991b) stresses that because stances may slide along a continuum between efferent and aesthetic, it is important for readers to be clear about their purposes for reading. As she states, "confusion about the purpose of reading has in the past contributed to failure to teach effectively both efferent reading and aesthetic reading. Why not help youngsters early to understand that there are two ways of reading?" (1991b, pp. 446-447).

Rosenblatt (1983, 1991b) argues that when students read literature, they should initially be free to focus on their "lived-through" experiences, their aesthetic transactions. She states that "after the reading, the experience should be recaptured, reflected on. It can be the subject of further aesthetic activities -- drawing, dancing, mime, talking, writing, role-playing, or oral interpretation. It can be discussed and analyzed efferently" (1991b, p. 447). Thus, after students have aesthetically read a literary work, teachers should guide them to reflect on their initial responses in order examine, crystallize, and expand those responses (Rosenblatt, 1983).

Discussions between a teacher and a group of students in which the participants share views and clarify understandings can enhance students' abilities to reflect on their literary experiences. As Rosenblatt (1983) asserts,

awareness that others have had different experiences with it [i.e., the text] will lead the reader back to the text for a closer look. The young reader points to what in the text explains his response. He
may discover, however, that he has overreacted to some elements and ignored others (p. 286).

Thus, sharing responses with others may influence students to consider alternative viewpoints and to more critically examine their own responses, enriching their literary understandings.

In conclusion, Rosenblatt's transactional theory defines reading as a reciprocal process that takes place between the reader and the text. Literary reading involves an aesthetic experience that is distinguished from predominantly nonliterary, or efferent, reading approaches. Through the aesthetic transaction, the reader evokes the literary work and responds to it. After the reader has "lived-through" the literary reading experience, her response may be reflected upon, analyzed, and shared with others. Studies of students sharing their responses with others can provide insights into their literary transactions and subsequent understandings. Furthermore, studies which investigate how teachers interact with students during discussions of literature can reveal approaches which foster or impede students' literary explorations.

Reader Response Research

Reader response researchers have investigated various reader, text, and/or context features that may affect children's responses to literature. Pertinent studies are discussed in this section.

A seminal study of response to literature from a developmental perspective was conducted by Applebee (1978). He asked samples of children aged six, nine, thirteen, and seventeen to tell about their favorite story. The six and nine-year-olds verbally discussed their answers in interviews. Nine-year-olds also completed written measures.
The older children responded in writing only. Applebee interpreted the children's responses at various ages as progressing along a continuum corresponding to Piagetian stages of cognitive development. The six-year-olds tended to give lengthy retellings of their favorite stories. Applebee described their responses as characteristic of the preoperational stage of development, when representations are highly concrete and are not likely to be reorganized into more general frameworks. Many of the nine-year-olds summarized their stories, showing the ability to organize and categorize which is associated with concrete operational thought. The adolescents showed evidence of formal operational thought. Specifically, the thirteen-year-olds tended to analyze a story's structure, and the seventeen-year-olds often generalized about a story, considering point of view and theme.

Based on his findings from the subjects' discussions of their favorite stories, along with findings from related measures of subjects' responses to literature, Applebee concluded that children's literary responses are in a sense "constrained" by development. In their studies of the oral responses of fourth, sixth, and eighth grade students to works of fantasy and realistic fiction, Galda (1990) and Cullinan, Harwood, and Galda (1983) asserted that their findings supported Applebee's developmental view.

Lehr (1991) also observed some developmental trends in children's responses to stories, but her findings differed from Applebee's in several respects. Lehr interviewed kindergarten, second, and fourth grade children to learn about their perspectives on the themes of picture book stories read to them. The students were asked to draw pictures about
the stories after hearing them read aloud by the researcher; interviews then followed in which the children had physical access to the books. Lehr noted that the ability to articulate themes improved as the children got older. Unlike Applebee (1978), however, she found that most of the kindergartners, as well as most of the second and fourth graders, could summarize a story when asked to tell what it was about "in a few words" or when questioned further about the story. In addition, several of the second and fourth graders who had had previous high exposure to children's books generated thematic statements that were at the levels of analysis and generalization.

Whereas Applebee's (1978) study suggests that the ability to analyze and generalize typically emerges in adolescence, Lehr's research indicates that younger children are capable of these more sophisticated levels of thinking. According to Lehr, asking the children to draw pictures of what the stories were about and allowing them to refer to the books during interviews appeared to focus the students on the themes of the stories. She noted that the interview format enabled her to invite rich and varied responses from the children. Furthermore, Lehr pointed out that the children's prior exposure to literature correlated highly with their degree of thematic awareness.

Focusing on adolescents, Langer (1989, 1990a) collected think-aloud protocols from 36 students, grades 7 and 11, to learn about their process of understanding literary and informational texts. The literary texts were short stories and poems; the informational materials were social studies and science texts. The choice of how to approach the reading of the texts (i.e., as literary or nonliterary works) was left up to
the subjects. Langer found that there were four recursive stances taken by students as they progressively constructed their "envisionments" of the texts. The four stances are as follows: (a) Being Out and Stepping Into an Envisionment, (b) Being In and Moving Through an Envisionment, (c) Stepping Back and Rethinking What One Knows, and (d) Stepping Out and Objectifying the Experience (Langer, 1989, p. 7). Langer noted that the stances represented meaning-making processes in general, regardless of the type of text being read; however, she found that the students did approach their reading of literary versus nonliterary texts differently. When reading the literary texts, they tended to reach toward a "horizon of possibilities" and to contemplate the human condition. Conversely, when reading the nonliterary texts, they tended to focus on keeping a point of reference in order to understand the topic.

In addition to studies which have focused on reader and text characteristics that may affect children's literary responses, several studies have used ethnographic approaches to explore response in the classroom context. Hickman (1979, 1981, 1983) pioneered research on elementary children's responses to literature in the naturally-occurring school environment. As a participant observer in an informal school, she studied the responses of 90 children in three multi-age classrooms, grades K-1, 2-3, and 4-5, over a four month period. Hickman identified the following "response events" which occurred in varying degrees across all grade levels: (a) listening behaviors such as laughter and applause; (b) contact with books, including browsing and keeping books at hand; (c) acting on the impulse to share (e.g., "Listen to this!"); (d) oral responses such as retelling and free comments; (e) actions and drama; (f) making
things (e.g., pictures, games); and (g) writing (1981, p. 346). Developmental trends were noted in the students' responses. For example, the K-1 children tended to use motor responses, such as acting out a character's movements, during teacher read-alouds of stories. Conversely, the grade 4-5 students were generally the most efficient at accomplishing all of the response types. Additionally, reliance on verbal expressions of response increased with age.

Hickman emphasized that the teachers "had considerable power to influence expressions of response through ability to manipulate the classroom context" (1981, p. 353). By selecting books for the classroom, by deciding how and when books would be presented and discussed, and by modeling and suggesting ways of responding, the teachers created contexts for response. Thus, they had a significant effect on the quantity and quality of their students' responses to literature.

Other researchers using ethnographic methods in elementary school settings have also asserted that the teacher is a key influence on children's literary responses (Hade, 1989; Hepler, 1982). In the grade 2-3 literature-based classroom that he observed for sixteen weeks, Hade (1989) found that the teacher gave her students many choices with regard to reading and responding to literature. She was accepting of the students' responses, but she also explicitly communicated certain expectations for various response events and pressed students to be thoughtful about their literary understandings. Hade concluded that a variety of response expectations and opportunities provided the children with ways of responding to literature that suited their individual styles.
Similarly, in a one-year study of a grade 5-6 classroom with a literature-based reading program, Hepler (1982) noted that the teacher influenced her students' responses in several ways. Specifically, the teacher valued reading and fostered enjoyment of literature. She also supplied books, read aloud, encouraged discussion, and furthered students' thinking by the questions she asked and the assignments she gave. In addition, Hepler emphasized that the children's responses were social in nature, influenced by the classroom context and peer relationships.

Drawing on their classroom observations of children's responses to literature, Hepler and Hickman (1982) asserted that "the literary transaction, the one-to-one conversation between author and audience, is frequently surrounded by other voices" (p. 279). The researchers described the social context in which children, along with their teacher and peers, talked about books as a "community of readers." Through talk about literature with others, children shared favored books, negotiated meanings, considered audience, and revealed their understandings (Hepler & Hickman, 1982).

Taken together, studies of reader response indicate that the context as well as developmental and text factors must be taken into account when considering children's responses to literature. In the classroom environment, the teacher has a significant influence on the number and kind of student responses that are expressed. The ethnographic studies in particular provide support for Rosenblatt's (1983, 1991b) argument that it is up to classroom teachers to help their students "live through" and reflect on their experiences with literature.
The research on reader response thus provides the impetus for more studies on how and under what circumstances students respond to literature in school settings. In the next section, research on one classroom context for discussion of literary understandings, the small group, is reviewed.

Research on Literature Discussion Groups

Research which centers on small group discussions of literature at the elementary level is a relatively new area of study. In anecdotal formats several classroom teachers and/or researchers have recently provided evidence that interactive talk with others in small groups can enrich elementary students' literary understandings (Au & Scheu, 1989; Edwards, 1991; Eeds & Peterson, 1991; Keegan & Shlake, 1991; Klassen, 1993; Newkirk & McLure, 1992; Samway et al., 1991; Short, 1990; Urzua, 1992; Watson & Davis, 1988). Similar anecdotal evidence has been given of middle and high school literature discussion groups (Cintorino, 1993; Close, 1990; Freedman, 1993; Golden, 1986).

In many of these anecdotal accounts of literature groups, the authors mention taking field notes (Klassen, 1993; Short, 1990), audiotaping or videotaping discussions (Freedman, 1993; Golden, 1986; Keegan & Shlake, 1991), and/or transcribing recorded discussions for analysis (Cintorino, 1993; Eeds & Peterson, 1991; Newkirk & McLure, 1992; Urzua, 1992); however, data collection procedures and/or analysis techniques are not clearly explicated. These accounts highlight teaching practices and strategies rather than research methods. For this reason,
empirical research reports rather than anecdotal accounts are the focus of this review.

The studies reviewed are broadly organized by methodology used, with teacher/researcher collaborations and researcher interventions being discussed first, followed by teacher-as-researcher studies and researcher as non-intervening participant observer investigations. This organization serves to highlight where gaps in the research on literature discussion groups exist. A few pertinent studies of middle school and secondary level literature discussion groups are included in the review, as they inform the inquiry into small group talk about literary texts in the classroom.

**Teacher/Researcher Collaborations and Researcher Interventions**

Eeds and Wells (1989) were among the first researchers to focus an investigation on teacher-led small groups as contexts for elementary students' literary meaning making. In their study, 17 college students enrolled in a reading practicum taught by one of the researchers were asked to lead literature study groups. The groups were composed of four to eight heterogeneously grouped fifth or sixth grade children. The researchers emphasized to the teachers-in-training the importance of participating as fellow readers rather than as expert interpreters of the literature. Asking predetermined, traditional comprehension questions was discouraged. Each group met for 30 minutes twice weekly over a four to five week period to discuss a realistic fiction or fantasy novel.

As participant observers, the researchers took field notes and audiotaped the discussions. Tapes were transcribed and a coding system was developed to characterize student and teacher talk. The researchers
chose the discussions of four of the groups for in-depth analysis. Group members' utterances in these discussions were counted and categorized as follows: (a) conversation maintenance (a form of collaborative talk), (b) involvement (comments related to personal associations with the text), (c) literal comprehension, (d) interpretation, and (e) evaluation. Based on their analysis, Eeds and Wells (1989) found that students in the groups articulated their literal comprehension of the texts, considered alternative viewpoints, shared personal stories related to the novels, actively made hypotheses and predictions which they checked as they read, and evaluated the texts and authors' styles.

The researchers concluded that all four groups succeeded in constructing literary meaning through collaborative interaction, even though the practicum teachers varied in their ability to engage students in dialogues (as opposed to more traditional question-answer sessions). The practicum teachers also varied in their ability to take advantage of literary "teachable moments;" that is, some were more adept than others at picking up on and calling attention to elements of literature (such as author's style) that were brought up during the discussions. Eeds and Wells (1989) noted, however, that even novice teachers could lead rich literary discussions when they strove to avoid the "inquisition mode" of teaching.

Other studies in which researchers worked with teachers to implement literature discussion groups have yielded similar findings. Crouse (1987) collaborated with a fifth grade teacher as the teacher undertook a discussion group strategy designed to actively involve students in talk about literature. As the teacher implemented the
strategy, her role in the discussions gradually shifted from that of a
directive asker of literal questions to that of a collaborative fellow group
member. Thus, students were given the opportunity to discuss their
literary responses in a cooperative environment. Although studying a
whole class (versus a small group) literature discussion, Roberts and
Langer (1991) also found that a seventh grade teacher in the role of
facilitator and listener helped students to collaboratively explore and
refine their literary understandings.

In a quasi-experimental study, O'Flahavan, Stein, Wiencek, and
Marks (1992) explored how a fourth grade teacher could actively
participate in discussions of short stories without assuming the role of
social and interpretive authority. The teacher was asked to adopt a
different role during discussions with each of four groups of six mixed
ability students: laissez-faire, boundary coaching, momentary
scaffolding, and boundary coaching/momentary scaffolding. In the
laissez-faire role, the teacher did not participate in the discussions. This
role was used with the control group. The other three roles involved
various kinds of teacher assistance given before, after, and/or during the
group discussions. All teacher assistance was aimed at helping students
diversify their ways of interpreting literature by considering author, text,
reader, and context factors.

The researchers found that students in all groups shared their
views on the stories, challenged each other's thinking, and improved
their social competence during discussions; however, the teacher-
assisted groups "developed more sophisticated interpretive repertoires
than their counterparts in the control group" (O'Flahavan et al., 1992, p.
Students in the teacher-assisted groups talked more extensively about the author's craft, characterization, literary devices, personal connections to the stories, and the alternative viewpoints of their peers. These students also became more proficient at developing and sustaining talk about a topic than did the control group members.

O'Flahavan et al. (1992) argued that the teacher played a key role in cultivating students' abilities to diversify their interpretations by adopting a proactive or responsive stance toward student talk about texts. In a study of researcher-led small group book discussions with sixth graders, Wilson (1975) similarly concluded that teachers need to use differing strategies for initiating discussions in order to help students respond to literature in diverse and personally meaningful ways.

Over a four month period Schulhauser (1990) studied the effect of participation in teacher-led literary group discussions on fourth grade students' critical thinking, attitude toward reading, and reading comprehension. Students in the treatment group met twice weekly with their teachers in groups of six to discuss a trade book. Students in the comparison group met individually with their teachers on a weekly basis to talk about self-selected texts they were reading. The researcher met with each participating teacher to discuss questioning strategies and to provide examples of lower and higher order questions.

Based on a comparison of pretest and posttest measures (such as a standardized achievement test), Schulhauser (1990) found that participating in discussion groups did not significantly affect children's critical thinking, attitude toward reading, or reading comprehension. A
qualitative analysis of teacher questions indicated, however, that treatment group teachers typically asked lower level questions and rarely urged students to support their responses. Schulhauser recommended that researchers conducting similar studies provide teachers with periodic feedback on their questioning and discussion techniques. Furthermore, the researcher acknowledged that test results give an incomplete picture of students' critical thinking abilities, that a larger qualitative component would enhance related research endeavors, and that it would be useful to study the development of critical thinking skills over the length of an entire school year.

Another pretest-posttest design study of teacher-led literature discussions was conducted by Morrow (1990). She investigated the impact of small group picture storybook readings on the literary responses and comprehension of kindergartners of low socioeconomic status. Eighteen experimental group teachers and 18 control group teachers each worked with a group of three children. All teachers were research assistants. The treatment group teachers read stories with their groups and engaged in interactive behavior (i.e., introducing the stories, inviting students' responses, and providing information and support). The control group teachers conducted standard reading readiness activities with their students, using a teacher's manual and student workbooks. Independent completion of workbook pages was stressed.

Comparison of the two groups revealed that the experimental group children made more comments and asked more questions about the meaning, story structure, print, and illustrations of the books used
in the posttest measures. The experimental group also scored significantly higher than did the control group on the posttest measure of comprehension (a probed recall test with questions related to story structure as well as to literal, inferential, and critical ideas).

In another study of teacher-led literature group discussions, Rogers (1987) examined the effects of two different social contexts on the interpretive processes of junior high school students. A class of 24 students individually read and responded in writing to a short story. They were then divided into two heterogeneous groups of 12 to discuss the text. One group was led by the classroom teacher, who conducted a traditional "question-answer" discussion. The researcher led the other group using a "response-centered" approach. That is, Rogers drew heavily on the students' earlier written reactions to the story as the basis for discussion.

In her analysis of the audiotaped discussion transcripts, Rogers (1987) found that student utterances in the response-centered group were usually longer and more fully developed than were student utterances in the question-answer group. She attributed the clipped speech of the question-answer participants to the teacher's prescriptive approach. Conversely, she deduced that the response-centered discussion -- in which she had intentionally brought up conflicting responses -- prompted many of the students to rethink and refine their original interpretations of the story. As Rogers (1987) stated, "when conflicting responses are shared, participants are likely to look toward a solution or consensus that is broader or more complex than positions originally taken" (p. 228). Like other studies of teacher-led small group
discussions, Rogers' inquiry indicates that the teacher's approach during discussion can enhance or impede students' literary responses.

Other researchers have found that elementary students can participate in productive literature group discussions without a teacher present when they are given instruction on how to interact during the discussions. In two related teacher/researcher collaboration studies, McMahon (1992a, 1992b) and Raphael et al. (1991) investigated student-led "Book Club" discussions that were part of a larger project to implement a literature-based reading program in two urban elementary classrooms (grades 4/5 and 5). During whole class instruction, teachers in the two classrooms talked with students about what to share and how to share in Book Club sessions (Raphael et al., 1991). The teachers modeled talking about story elements, drawing on previous knowledge, and asking questions, for example. Additionally, strategies for turn-taking, listening to others, and following-up on peer comments were discussed during whole class instruction.

Reporting the results of a preliminary analysis only, Raphael et al. (1991) found that Book Club participants interacted for several purposes, including the following: (a) to share reading log written responses to the books, (b) to clarify confusing aspects of a text, (c) to discuss a selection's theme, (d) to make connections between texts, (e) to critique the books and to consider the author's purposes, (f) to discuss group processes, and (g) to share personal experiences or prior knowledge related to the texts. Looking at Book Club groups in the fifth grade classroom, McMahon (1992a, 1992b) noted that the teacher's instructional focus influenced the patterns of student interaction during group sessions.
Specifically, the teacher emphasized either personal response or reading strategies and skills (such as summarizing a story's plot) for the students' reading log prompts, and the log entries were used to begin Book Club discussions. McMahon (1992b) asserted that "the more open-ended responses fostered greater student interactions than those that were text based" (p. 293). Group composition, such as who assumed a leadership role and how students reacted to the responses of their peers, also influenced interactional patterns (McMahon, 1992a, 1992b). McMahon concluded that because student-led literature discussions are not the norm in most classrooms, it is important for students to receive instruction on how to interact and to be given time to develop their literary responses through reading, writing, and discussing.

Leal (1992) also investigated peer group discussions of literature. (See also Leal, 1993, for an anecdotal account of her peer group study.) She read aloud a storybook, an informational book, and an informational storybook to first, third, and fifth graders in groups of six. The children were prompted to share their responses three times during the reading of each text. Based on an analysis of transcripts of the audiotaped student discussions, Leal found that children in all of the groups typically drew on prior knowledge, peer-supplied information, and/or textual information when talking about the books. She also found that the fifth grade students showed more involvement with their peers than did the younger children. The fifth graders were more likely to draw on peer information, to engage in longer discussions, and to challenge or confirm their peers' remarks. Although Leal attributed these differences between the older and younger students' discussions to age, the fact that
she used the same three texts with all subjects suggests that the books themselves -- and their relative appropriateness for children spanning grades one, three, and five -- may have also influenced the nature and degree of the students' responses.

Finally, Leal (1992) discovered that the informational storybook in particular stimulated student discussion. Specifically, when compared to discussions of the other two types of texts, student talk about the informational storybook was more likely to use peer information, to sustain a topic, to engage in speculation, and to focus on extra-textual experiences. Leal attributed these findings to the combination of narrative and expository writing within the informational storybook; she stated that this writing influences young readers to wrestle with an ambiguous text structure as they attempt to interpret the material.

Viewed collectively, the teacher/researcher collaboration studies and the studies in which researchers intervened to implement particular discussion strategies reveal information about several factors that influence students' literary meaning making in small group contexts. In particular, how the teacher or adult group leader interacts with students during discussions (Crouse, 1987; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Morrow, 1990; O'Flahavan, et al., 1992; Rogers, 1987; Schulhauser, 1990; Wilson, 1975), the explicit instruction s/he gives on small group processes and procedures (McMahon, 1992a, 1992b; Raphael et al., 1991), and the texts chosen for discussion (Leal, 1992) all appear to have an effect on the nature of students' talk in literature groups. The findings of these studies have in common the influence of outside researchers on teaching practices and/or on particular discussion group interactions. Much
remains to be learned about how teachers are applying concepts related to literature discussion groups on their own in naturally-occurring classroom settings. The studies reviewed in the next section were undertaken from the perspective of teachers conducting research in their own classrooms.

**Teacher-as-Researcher Studies**

A small number of recent teacher-as-researcher studies have begun to provide insights into how elementary teachers are implementing small group discussions of literature in their classrooms. Audio tapes of discussions were among the data collected in these investigations, which are discussed in this section.

Anzul (1988, 1993), an elementary school librarian, engaged in small group discussions of literature with fifth and sixth grade students over a two year period. She used Rosenblatt's transactional theory as a framework to guide her approach to conducting and studying the discussions. During discussions Anzul encouraged the students to talk to each other and not just to her, to become aware of and express their aesthetic responses, and to go back to the story "to see what had evoked particular responses or what could support a reader's interpretations or predictions" (Anzul, 1993, p. 190). She also asked open-ended questions and questions that encouraged higher-level thinking. In addition, the children were invited to express their personal responses through writing or drawing. Anzul found that students shared and explored their aesthetic responses during discussions, related the stories to other life experiences, and built on or challenged each other's interpretations. Analysis of discussion transcripts also revealed that over time the
students became more proficient at sustaining discussions at the levels of comprehension and analysis without teacher intervention.

Teachers also adopted nondominant roles during literature discussions in other teacher-as-researcher investigations. Over the course of a year-long study, Paille (1991) strove to interact with her fifth grade students as a fellow reader during small group discussions and in related student dialogue journals. Analysis of her discussion roles revealed that she also acted as a teacher (e.g., asking questions to take advantage of a "teachable moment"), a facilitator (e.g., making clarifying statements), and an enforcer (e.g., intervening when a jumble of overlapping voices made communication impossible). Analysis of student talk during discussions showed that group members clarified their understandings of the stories, shared and defended their opinions and interpretations, related the stories to their own experiences and prior knowledge, speculated about possibilities, discussed authors' choices, and constructed meanings as a group. Paille concluded that interactions with peers and the teacher enhanced students' literary responses.

Crawford and Hoopingarner (1993) studied the talk of four first grade boys participating in collaborative literature groups with a teacher (Crawford) for the first time. The group members met daily for two weeks to discuss a fiction or nonfiction book, and they were followed through three book studies. One discussion transcript from each of the three book studies was selected for analysis. Students were expected to plan what they wanted to do for each group meeting, while the teacher acted as a facilitator and fellow participant during the literature
discussions. After analysis of an early discussion transcript revealed that the children had difficulty sustaining talk about a topic and attending to the remarks of their peers, the teacher prompted the students to consider group processes. The transcript was shared with the children, and they brainstormed solutions.

Overall, analysis of the discussions revealed that students made comments that clarified confusing aspects of a text, maintained the conversations, and revealed new insights that emerged through interaction. Furthermore, students made inferences, shared opinions, talked about the details of a book, and made connections between the texts and personal experiences or previously read books. Crawford and Hoopingarner (1993) stated that the children "continued to connect conversations about books they had already read to the book they were currently reading... The students knew they were becoming a community with shared experiences" (p. 270).

Strickland, Dillon, Funkhouser, Glick, and Rogers (1989) conducted a two month "exploratory investigation" in which teacher-researchers gathered and documented information about the dialogues occurring in first, second, third, and sixth grade literature response groups. The response groups were student-directed and typically involved one student sharing a book s/he had recently read and then inviting peer questions or comments. When teachers sat in on the groups, they occasionally interjected "authentic" questions and remarks (as opposed to test-like questions); however, students retained control of the discussions.
Reporting on a preliminary analysis of the data only, Strickland et al. (1989) asserted that students in the response groups learned through talk about literary elements, genres, authors, and many aspects of reading comprehension (e.g., comparing and contrasting information, predicting outcomes, and metacognition). The children also showed that they were learning to consider their audience as they formulated comments about the books. Furthermore, it was noted that the teachers had modeled questions, such as "why" questions about an author's style, early in the school year and that similar questions were increasingly used by students in the response groups. Strickland et al. (1989) concluded that response groups provided opportunities for authentic interactive talk about literary works by placing children in the role of expert and giving them a sense of control over the conversations.

Other teachers-as-researchers have explored student-led literature discussion groups. For example, Scott (1992) studied fifth grade students' responses to literature in student-directed discussion groups. The teacher-as-researcher found that students constructed meaning from texts with their peers, were actively involved in decision-making, and felt a sense of empowerment through their participation in the groups. In addition, the children seemed to prefer the discussion groups as contexts for meaning making over individual response journals.

Short (1993) investigated student-only literature groups centered around "Text Sets" in grades 3 and 6. Short and two other teacher-researchers put together sets of conceptually related books for students to compare and discuss in small groups. Group participants were responsible for deciding which books from the sets to read and how to
read and discuss the books in their groups. Children were encouraged to initially share their aesthetic responses, then to examine those responses more closely and to make connections across books. Teachers established the framework for discussion and helped students determine and reflect on group reading and discussion strategies. Short (1993) found that students engaged in collaborative dialogues and made various types of intertextual connections. Specifically, they made connections across books to story elements, illustrations, authors, personal experiences and previous readings, and/or new experiences (e.g., finding additional books that were related to topics of interest in the text sets).

Student-led small group discussions of chapter books were compared to teacher-led whole class discussions by Daniel (1991), who conducted the study in her own seventh grade classroom. Both discussion formats were described as reader response approaches. Data analysis revealed that the students' oral responses were similar across the two discussion formats; however, students tended to make more conversation maintenance utterances in the student-led literature study groups.

Finally, a study involving student-led discussions at the high school level provides further insights on patterns of talk about literature in the classroom. The study does not fit neatly into the methodological categories used to organize the literature discussion group research, but since it included a researcher whose classroom was part of the investigation, it is presented here. Smagorinsky and Fly (1993) explored the social processes that occurred in teacher-led whole class literature
discussions and subsequent student-led small group discussions in four high school classrooms, including the class of the senior investigator (Smagorinsky). For the purposes of the study, participants were given a set of basic questions to guide their discussions of short stories, but teachers were urged to conduct the whole class discussions as they "normally" would. Similarly, students were instructed to talk about the questions in their small groups but were not told how to do so.

Discussions were audiotaped and transcribed, and group processes were examined from a Vygotskian perspective. The researchers focused their transcript analysis on the two teachers whose discussions contrasted the most with each other. During whole class discussions one teacher tried to "scaffold" literary understanding by providing students with extended extra-textual frameworks (e.g., relating the story to current events); however, he rarely used questions to encourage students to develop their own frameworks. In the subsequent small group discussions, student talk was unelaborated, and participants did not try to inform their interpretations with extra-textual frameworks. Conversely, in the whole class discussion led by the other teacher (Smagorinsky), student and teacher talk was more interactive in nature. The teacher tried to scaffold students' literary understandings by asking questions designed to help students make their own extra-textual connections. In the subsequent small group discussions, student talk was elaborated, and participants spent considerable time making connections between the story and extra-textual sources of information. Smagorinsky and Fly (1993) concluded that teacher discourse practices during whole class discussions influenced the patterns of talk that
emerged in student-led small group discussions. They also asserted the following:

Teachers who perceive their role as that of a model who does not engage learners in the act of inquiry are not likely to help learners internalize requisite skills. On the other hand, teachers who participate with students in inquiry and whose role involves them as less a model and more a prompter and inquisitor stand a greater chance of helping students internalize the skills of interpretation that will enable them to perform independently (p. 169).

In summary, the teacher-as-researcher studies, like the teacher/researcher collaborations and researcher interventions, indicate that the teacher plays a key role in creating productive contexts for student discussions of literature in small groups. Teachers-as-researchers who participated in small group discussions asked open-ended, higher order, and/or authentic questions (Anzul, 1988, 1993; Strickland et al., 1989) and took advantage of teachable moments (Paille, 1991). They also strove to adopt a nondominant stance during the discussions, describing their roles as that of facilitator and/or fellow participant. The research also suggests that teacher talk in other classroom discussions appears to influence student talk in literature group meetings (Strickland et al., 1989; Smagorinsky & Fly, 1993).

In particular, the elementary level teacher-as-researcher studies depict small group discussions as meaningful, cooperative contexts for the enrichment of young students' literary understandings. In these contexts students were observed sharing their aesthetic responses,
making connections between the texts and their personal lives, discussing literary elements and author's style, raising questions, clarifying their understandings, and/or reflecting on their thinking.

Studies of literature group discussions undertaken from the perspective of researchers acting mainly as observers in naturally-occurring classroom settings would add another dimension to the body of knowledge on the current status of literature discussion group practices at the elementary level. In the following section, literature discussion group studies conducted by researchers who entered classrooms to observe naturally-occurring contexts are reviewed.

**Researcher as Non-Intervening Participant Observer Studies**

Few studies of literature discussion groups at the elementary level have been undertaken from the perspective of a researcher (other than the classroom teacher) in the role of participant observer in a naturally-occurring classroom environment. In a year-long study, Wollman-Bonilla (1991) used ethnographic methods to describe discourse practices and social meaning construction in teacher-led small group discussions of literature in a sixth grade classroom. She compared three discussion groups, each comprised of socioculturally diverse students: (a) low-ability (as labeled by the teacher) students who used patterns of talk that differed from the class norm and who were primarily from working-class backgrounds, (b) high-ability students who used Standard English dialect, and (c) heterogeneously-grouped students who used Standard English dialect. Most students in the high-ability and heterogeneous groups were from middle-class backgrounds.
The researcher found that the teacher's and students' discourse practices and their attitudes about books and reading instruction influenced the kind of group discussions that they co-constructed. Specifically, in the high ability and heterogeneous groups, the match between teacher and student discourse practices contributed to the construction of a context in which student comments were valued and participants engaged in collaborative meaning making. Conversely, in the low ability group, the conflicting discourse practices of the teacher and students generated a different type of discussion. Specifically, participants co-constructed a context in which the teacher controlled the talk and student-initiated meaning making was constrained. Wollman-Bonilla (1991) concluded that both the nature of teacher-student interactions and how the teacher assessed the students' abilities were fundamentally, systematically, and unconsciously influenced by discourse practices. Her findings are supported by related sociolinguistic research on classroom speech events and language patterns; this research indicates that teachers often misunderstand and/or undervalue the nonmainstream discourse styles of minority students (Cazden, 1988; Heath, 1982a, 1983; Michaels, 1986).

Gilles (1990, 1991) studied the small group literature discussions of seventh grade students labeled learning disabled and their teachers in two resource rooms. (See also Gilles, 1993.) The teachers adopted nondominant stances during the discussions. They encouraged students to elaborate on their thinking, to explain how they reached a particular conclusion, and to address important topics (Gilles, 1990). Analysis of transcripts of the audiotaped discussions revealed that students talked
about the following: literary elements and the author, the process of reading, group processes, and personal and social issues. Additionally, students collaborated to retell a story, shared personal responses to and opinions of the books, asked questions about confusing aspects of a text, engaged in critical analysis of the books, and related the stories to their own lives. Individual student interviews indicated that group participants recognized that reading and discussing the books could improve their reading abilities. Gilles (1991) concluded that her findings disproved the necessity of a deficit model of instruction for special education students.

Finally, a large-scale study combining observational and experimental methods was conducted by Nystrand, Gamoran, and Heck (1993) to explore the use of small groups in ninth grade English classrooms. The researchers were interested in how teachers used small group activities to promote student thinking about literature. They visited 54 classrooms, conducting four observations in each one. Small group activities occurred infrequently in the targeted class sessions; only 29 such activities were observed. Further, the researchers characterized most of the group work as "collaborative seatwork." In these activities the teacher prescribed group parameters, and student interaction was not really necessary to complete the "fill in the blank"-type assignments. Conversely, in the less frequently occurring "autonomous" groups, the teachers defined group goals and tasks but allowed more latitude in student interactions. In these activities students were more likely to engage in meaningful, coherent conversations that fostered "student production of knowledge" (Nystrand et al., 1993, p. 18).
The researchers measured the effects of small group work on student achievement by using regression analysis and administering a literature test. They found that overall, the more time classes spent in small groups, the lower their achievement scores. A closer look at the nature of the small group work (collaborative seatwork versus more autonomous group activities) revealed, however, that "collaborative seatwork reduces achievement, but group work in which students actively construct interpretations promotes achievement" (Nystrand et al., 1993, p. 20). The researchers concluded that teachers need to define group parameters and tasks while leaving room for student collaboration and decision-making in order for small group literary work to be successful and meaningful to students.

Findings from the studies which involved researchers observing in naturally-occurring classroom settings highlight once again the key role of the teacher in creating meaningful contexts for literature discussion. The Wollman-Bonilla (1991) investigation indicates that differing discourse practices between teachers and students can hinder collaborative literary dialogues in the classroom. Clearly more observational studies of literature discussion groups in elementary classrooms are needed to further illuminate current teaching practices in this area.

Summary

Social constructivist perspectives, Vygotskian theory, research on classroom discourse, reader response theory and research, and
researcher-influenced literature discussion group practices together point to the potential of small group discussions as forums for the enrichment of students' literary understandings. Educators and researchers presenting anecdotal evidence also portray the small group discussion as a viable context for students' collaborative meaning making with literature. Nevertheless, much remains to be learned about how teachers are currently implementing literature-based teaching practices, such as the use of literature discussion groups, in naturally-occurring elementary classrooms.

Teacher-as-researcher investigations and a few participant observer studies are emerging to supply needed in-depth information on actual literature discussion group practices. Indeed, ways to improve literature-based teaching in general and literature discussion group strategies in particular cannot be adequately and effectively developed until existing practices are identified and elucidated. The current practices of particular teachers may suggest directions for improvement as well as the means of achieving it. Thus, the points of departure for future improvement as well as for future research need to be further explored in naturally-occurring classroom contexts.

This descriptive study was undertaken to contribute to a small but growing body of research on teacher-led small group discussions of literature in the elementary classroom. The researcher's purpose as a participant observer was to describe and analyze how three upper elementary teachers conducted literature group discussions in their classrooms. Teacher discussion strategies, student patterns of talk during group sessions, and teacher and student perspectives on
literature groups were investigated. The methodology used in the study is described in the next chapter.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHODS

They [the Japanese] say Americans are too eager to make theories. They say we don't spend enough time observing the world, and so we don't know how things actually are [emphasis in the original]. (Crichton, 1992, p. 43)

This chapter presents the research methods of the study. First, a rationale for the research methodology is submitted. Second, the research design and procedures, including data collection and analysis techniques, are described. Next, the researcher discusses the credibility and trustworthiness criteria applied to the study. Definitions of general terms used are also provided. Finally, limitations of the study are given.

A Rationale for the Research Methodology

Literature-based language arts programs are burgeoning in elementary classrooms across the country. Engaging students in small group discussions of children's books is one increasingly popular practice within these programs. Yet, in spite of the growth of literature-based approaches to language arts teaching, few studies have explored how teachers are actually viewing and implementing these
approaches in their classrooms (Walmsley & Walp, 1989). Similarly, with regard to discussions of literature in the classroom, Martinez and Roser (1991) maintain that "few investigators have addressed the question of how the teacher in the role of story discussant can promote children's growth as responders" (p. 649). Observational studies that illuminate relevant dimensions of the teacher's role in discussing literature with children are needed before larger-scale investigations can be undertaken. Furthermore, ascertaining and describing the current status of literature use in elementary classrooms, including the implementation of small group discussions of literature, should precede prescriptive suggestions for improving literature-based teaching practices. As Peshkin (1993) states, "Clearly, the soundness of nondescriptive and prescriptive aspects of research rests essentially on what has been provided by the accuracy, sensitivity, and comprehensiveness of its descriptive foundation" (p. 24).

Thus, research studies with a qualitative orientation can contribute to a greater understanding of teachers' current practices and perspectives concerning small group discussions of literature. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) list five key features of qualitative research:

1. Qualitative research has the natural setting as the direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument;
2. Qualitative research is descriptive;
3. Qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products;
4. Qualitative researchers tend to analyze their data inductively; and

5. 'Meaning' [as understood by the participants] is of essential concern to the qualitative approach. (pp. 29-32)

In particular, case studies (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) of elementary teachers can provide needed description and analysis of salient features of literature group discussions, as perceived by teacher and student participants and by a researcher in the role of a "participant-observer" (e.g., Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Patton, 1990). Thus, this study was undertaken to learn more about three teachers' practices and perspectives regarding small group discussions of literature in their classrooms. The research design of the study is presented in the following sections.

The Research Design: An Overview

The researcher employed qualitative methods to prepare descriptive case studies of three elementary teachers (grades 4 and 5), each of whom involved a small group of their students in discussions of literature. The study was designed to explore: (a) teachers' observed practices and stated perspectives concerning literature discussion groups; (b) teachers' and students' patterns of talk within a series of literature group discussions; and (c) students' perspectives on the discussions. The researcher observed and audiotaped the teacher and students in one discussion group per classroom as they read and discussed one children's novel from beginning to end. Interview data
were also gathered and analyzed to learn about participants' perspectives on the literature groups. Although few in number, student- and teacher-produced documents relevant to the literature groups were collected as well. Patterns were searched for and identified across the multiple data sources for each case, and a coding system was developed to characterize the participants' talk in the observed literature group discussions. An account of the research design for this study begins with information on the selection of teacher and student participants.

**Participants**

In this section the researcher provides information about the teacher and student participants for the study. More detailed descriptions of the participants are presented in Chapter IV. Pseudonyms have been used for all participants and their schools to protect their anonymity.

**Teachers**

For the purposes of this study, the researcher wanted to locate three upper elementary teachers (grades 4 and/or 5) who reported using small group discussions of literature in their classrooms. Teachers of grades 4 and/or 5 were specified because of the researcher's own background and interests in upper elementary level teaching. Furthermore, students in grades 4 and 5 are generally able to engage in sustained independent reading of chapter books/novels, the
oft-cited reading materials of literature discussion groups in previous research and pedagogical publications (Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1993). In addition, children in the upper elementary grades have typically developed the ability to summarize rather than simply retell stories, and they are beginning to move toward more sophisticated levels of response, such as analysis of story parts and the formulation of generalizations about the meaning of a story (Applebee, 1978). Of the ability to summarize stories, Huck et al. (1993) state, "this is a skill that facilitates discussion and becomes more useful as it is developed" (p. 88).

More specifically, the researcher was looking for grade 4 and/or 5 teachers who met with students in small groups (approximately three to seven students) on a daily or weekly basis to discuss a children's novel as it was read from beginning to end. Sustained discussions (at least 15 minutes each) were desired so that a sufficient amount of talk could be recorded and analyzed. The researcher specified the size and format of the discussion groups she wished to study in order facilitate comparisons across teachers who used similar procedures. Comparable size and format specifications were noted in other studies of or publications on literature discussion groups (e.g., Eeds & Wells, 1989; Hanssen, 1990; Samway et al., 1991).

The researcher also chose to locate teachers who reported engaging students in literature group discussions for at least one year prior to the school year of the study. Teachers who had already given literature groups some thought and who had already developed
strategies for their use in the classroom were desired, as opposed to teachers who had not yet implemented such groups. The purpose of the study was to explore how teachers were currently viewing and conducting literature discussion groups, not to investigate how teachers would go about starting such groups in their classrooms. Furthermore, the risk of teacher participants trying to match stated perspectives and practices with perceived researcher expectations was likely to be greater with teachers inexperienced in the use of literature groups.

Finally, the researcher selected three as the number of teacher participants for several reasons. First, given that no two teachers are likely to have identical methods of conducting literature discussion groups, by working with more than one teacher the researcher was able to explore multiple group discussion strategies and practices and to make comparisons across cases. Second, in order to compare cases that occurred at approximately the same time during the school year (i.e., autumn), the researcher planned to observe all focal discussions within a nine week period. Consequently, three was the maximum number of teachers with whom the researcher could work, given the time constraints of the study.

A university supervisor of student teachers assisted the researcher in locating the participants for the study. The supervisor was in contact with elementary teachers who used literature-based approaches to teaching, and she introduced the researcher to an elementary principal who was helping her teachers implement whole
language practices in their classrooms. The supervisor put the researcher in touch with two teachers who were interested in participating, and the elementary principal recommended the third teacher.

Follow-up conversations with the three teachers, along with their completion of an introductory questionnaire (see Appendix A), confirmed their suitability for the purposes of the research and their willingness to participate in the study. One of the teachers, Ms. Scott, usually did not begin conducting literature discussion groups until about halfway through the school year. She agreed to do a group earlier than usual in order to participate in the study. (Ms. Scott's situation is explained in more depth in Chapter IV.) The researcher gave a prospectus of the study to the appropriate school district personnel and building principals and received their permission to proceed with the study. Table 1 contains an overview of the three teachers and their school settings. More detailed information on the participants is presented in Chapter IV.
Table 1

**Teachers and School Settings**

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<th>Ms. Roberts</th>
<th>Ms. Scott</th>
<th>Ms. Jennings</th>
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<td>Dover</td>
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<td><strong>Grade</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Yrs. experience</strong></td>
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The researcher met with the three teacher participants as a group in an introductory, audiotaped session to do the following: provide more information about the study, determine scheduling for observations in the teachers' classrooms, and choose a genre of children's literature (e.g., realistic fiction, fantasy) to be used with the focal groups. The researcher asked the teachers to bring children's books to the meeting; the researcher also brought books. For the purposes of the study, the teachers were asked to collaboratively select one genre of literature to use with the participating discussion groups. The researcher further requested that the teachers agree to either use.
books they had not used previously with literature discussion groups, or books they had used before with such groups.

Choosing one genre of literature gave the three groups a common variable. It was also intended to reduced data analysis complications that might have arisen from the possibility of three different groups discussing three different genres of texts. Previous research has suggested that children respond differently to realistic stories than they do to fantasies, for example (Galda, 1990). The audiotaped meeting also provided the researcher with preliminary data on the teachers' perspectives on literature discussion groups.

In the introductory meeting the three teachers agreed on the genre of realistic fiction for the focal discussions. Works of realistic fiction are set in the realm of the possible, including present-day stories (contemporary realistic fiction) and stories set in the past (historical fiction). Huck, Hepler, and Hickman (1993) define realistic fiction as "imaginative writing that accurately reflects life as it was lived in the past or could be lived today" (p. 527). One teacher chose a work of contemporary realistic fiction, Anastasia Krupnik (by Lois Lowry, 1979). The other two teachers chose works of historical fiction, Ida Early Comes Over the Mountain (by Robert Burch, 1980) and Incident at Hawk's Hill (by Allan Eckert, 1971). Synopses of the three books are provided in Chapter IV. All three teachers reported that they had not conducted group discussions with these particular books prior to the study.
Students

A number of factors influenced the selection of students for the focal literature discussion group within each teacher's classroom. The teachers were encouraged to put together groups as they "normally" would; the researcher did not stipulate that students of a particular ability or gender be placed in the focal groups. The researcher did request, however, that the two grade 3/4 teachers choose all fourth graders for the groups to be studied. As explained earlier, the study's focus was on upper elementary-age students. One grade 3/4 teacher, Ms. Roberts, had grouped students for literature discussions by grade level prior to this study. Thus, the researcher's request was not a deviation from this teacher's normal practices. Conversely, the other 3/4 teacher, Ms. Scott, made it clear to the researcher that she typically and purposefully mixed third and fourth graders together in her literature groups. The researcher's request thus altered how Ms. Scott normally configured her literature discussion groups. Parental permission and student willingness to participate in the study also influenced the make-up of the groups. The students who participated in the three focal groups are described in Chapter IV.

Data Collection

The researcher collected data in the form of observational field notes (e.g., Glesne & Peshkin, 1992), transcripts of audiotaped discussion sessions, transcripts of audiotaped interviews with the teachers and discussion group students, and any applicable documents.
Thus, the researcher utilized participant-observation methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Erickson, 1986; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Patton, 1990) similar to those used by qualitative researchers (e.g., ethnographers) in fields such as anthropology and sociology. The researcher had gained experience in the use of participant-observation methods in a seven week pilot study on peer group reading in a grade 4/5 classroom (Allen, 1992). In this section, the researcher's role, the data collection schedule, and observation, interview, and document collection procedures for the study reported here are discussed.

**The Role of the Researcher**

During the data collection process, the researcher's role on the participant-observation continuum (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) was that of an "observer as participant" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), a researcher who assumes an observer as participant role in the data collection process interacts with the participants in a study but is principally an observer. In this study, the researcher talked informally with and interviewed the teacher and student participants; however, during the focal group discussion sessions, the researcher was chiefly an observer. The purpose of the research was to describe and analyze teacher strategies and student talk during small group discussions of literature and to learn about the participants' perspectives on literature discussions. Consequently, the researcher avoided the following actions when interacting with participants: giving her own opinions on the purposes and functions of literature groups, offering suggestions
on how to conduct literature discussions, and taking an active role in the focal discussions themselves. Furthermore, the researcher presented herself to the student participants as an adult observer interested in learning more about how they and their teachers talked about books. She strove not to be viewed as a second teacher in the group discussions. For example, in Ms. Jennings' group the children sometimes sat on the floor during the discussions while their teacher sat in a chair; when the students sat on the floor, so did the researcher.

The researcher acknowledges, however, that while she strove to exert minimal influence on the focal literature discussions themselves and on the participants' views regarding literature discussions, she did manipulate a few specific aspects of the contexts for discussion in the three cases. As previously noted, for the purposes of the study the researcher directly influenced the following: the teachers' selection of books to use in the discussions; the grade level of the student participants chosen for the focal groups in Ms. Roberts' and Ms. Scott's classes (fourth grade versus third and fourth grade); and, in Ms. Scott's case, the timing of the discussions (autumn versus winter).

Data Collection Schedule

The data collection phase of the study took place over approximately a five month period in the fall and winter of 1992-1993. This time period began with the introductory group teacher meeting in September and concluded with a group teacher interview in January. The closing group teacher interview was conducted a month after the completion of all focal literature discussions. In between the two
teacher meetings, the researcher engaged in classroom and focal literature group observations and interviews with teacher and student participants. During the course of the study relevant documents were also gathered. Additionally, after substantial data analysis had been undertaken, the researcher returned to the field to conduct final member check interviews with each of the teachers (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Member checking is discussed in the "Credibility and Trustworthiness" section of this chapter.

The timetable for data collection was structured so that all focal literature discussions were observed within a nine week time frame (mid-October to mid-December, 1992). Thus, each group was observed during the same period in time, the fall of the 1992 school year. Scheduling of observations depended on how the teachers formatted the discussion groups and was negotiated with the teachers. The researcher observed the daily/weekly discussion group sessions of each focal group as participants discussed one book from beginning to end. Each group held between seven and nine discussions over a span of two to five weeks. Group sessions lasted from approximately 20 to 50 minutes each; the average time was about 35 minutes. (Table 9 in Chapter V presents summary information on the three focal groups.)

Observations

Prior to the onset of each teacher's focal literature group discussions, the researcher visited the classrooms three to four times for one to two hours per visit. During each visit the researcher observed and took field notes. In particular, the researcher attended to
language arts-related activities and to the use of literature in the classrooms, since the focus of the study was one component of literature-based approaches to language arts teaching. These initial observations were done to obtain a sense of each classroom's context/atmosphere and to become at least somewhat familiar with the students. During one of these initial visits to each room, the researcher introduced herself to the class and explained her presence, research interests, and intentions. Brief field notes were also recorded on classroom events immediately preceding and following all observed discussion group sessions.

All of the discussion sessions, a total of 24, were audiotaped. The researcher, in the role of observer, took notes during all of the sessions with the exception of one. She was unable to attend the fifth discussion for Ms. Scott's group. The teacher audiotaped this session for the researcher, but it was not a discussion selected for in-depth analysis. The researcher's note-taking during the focal discussions consisted primarily of efforts to record who was speaking and a key word or phrase that identified what that person said. Speakers frequently overlapped and/or interrupted each other during the discussions; the researcher's notes were intended to facilitate transcription of the audiotapes. The researcher also wrote notes on group seating arrangements and on some nonverbal behaviors that occurred during the discussions, such as hand-raising; however, the observational focus was on the participants' talk. (Sample field notes are included in Appendix D.)
Interviews

In order to better understand the participants' perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Erickson, 1986; Patton, 1990) on the purposes and functions of literature discussion groups in general and on the observed groups in particular, the researcher interviewed both the teachers and the focal students. The number and format of the interviews conducted are explained next.

Teacher Interviews

The teachers' perspectives on literature discussion groups emerged across several conversational formats, including four audiotaped individual interviews with each teacher and two audiotaped group teacher meetings. The researcher transcribed all audiotaped interviews, a total of 14. During classroom visits the researcher also took field notes on informal (nonaudiotaped) talks with the teachers. The audiotaped individual interviews and the closing group teacher meeting comprised the largest source of data on the teachers' views.

Group teacher meetings were held at the onset and close of the data collection phase of the study. The introductory group meeting was discussed in the "Participants" section of this chapter. The final group meeting brought closure to the study. It was conducted within a month of the last researcher-observed group discussion. (The last group concluded its discussions right before the Christmas holidays, and the closing teacher meeting was held soon after school resumed in January.) In the meeting the researcher asked the teachers to reflect on the focal discussions and on the use of literature groups in general. A
structured interview format was used (Fetterman, 1989) in the meeting. That is, the researcher asked the group of teachers prepared questions which had emerged during the course of the research. (The closing teacher meeting interview questions are listed in Appendix B.)

A nonschedule standardized interview format (Denzin, 1989) was used to conduct three individual interviews with each teacher during the data collection phase of the research. (See Appendix B for sample interview questions.) The interview format enabled the researcher to ask similar questions of each participant for comparison purposes; simultaneously, it allowed adjustment of the order and phrasing of the questions based on the individual interviewee and interview context. The interview questions were formulated with the basic research questions of the study in mind. Based on the researcher's interactions with and observations of the participants, additional questions that applied specifically to each teacher's case were also framed. Each interview lasted from approximately 15 minutes to 1 hour.

A fourth interview, which served as a final member check (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), was conducted with each teacher following the data collection phase of the study. In the member check interviews the researcher shared evolving assertions (Erickson, 1986) about the observed discussions and emerging patterns noted in student and teacher talk. The purpose was elicit the teachers' perspectives on those assertions and patterns. In addition, the researcher asked questions to clarify her understandings of the teachers' stated perspectives.
Student Interviews

The researcher also interviewed the students who participated in the focal group discussions. Specifically, the students in each group were interviewed once individually on the same day, after they had had a chance to participate in several of the focal discussion group sessions. Additionally, the researcher conducted one student-only group interview with each of the three focal groups after their final discussion session. These group interviews were designed to give the students a chance to reflect on their experiences. The group interviews also enabled the researcher to learn more about the children's perspectives on the literature discussion groups. All student interviews, a total of 21, were audiotaped and transcribed by the researcher.

The specific interview questions for the individual and group interviews were formulated during the data collection phase of the study. The format of the student interviews most closely resembled what Denzin (1989) calls a "schedule standardized interview;" that is, each respondent (and group) was asked the same questions in the same order. Denzin, however, states that schedule standardized interview questions are worded exactly the same for every interviewee. In this study the researcher rephrased questions when it appeared that the students did not understand them as they were originally worded. Furthermore, follow-up questions were asked of some students when their answers were unclear or seemed to warrant elaboration. Individual and group student interview questions are listed in Appendix C.
Documents

Using a variety of data sources strengthens the design of a qualitative inquiry (Erickson, 1986; Patton, 1990). Thus, in addition to observational field notes and transcripts of audiotaped interviews and focal group discussions, documents relevant to the study were collected by the researcher. At the onset of the study the teachers completed an introductory questionnaire which provided preliminary information on their literature discussion group practices and perspectives (see Appendix A). During the observation phase of the study, few documents were produced by the participants that were relevant to the literature discussions themselves. The researcher collected the following documents applicable to the study: (a) samples of Ms. Scott's discussion questions which she wrote in her copy of the book read for her group's discussions; (b) Ms. Jennings' preparatory notes recorded before her group's first meeting; (c) copies of students' journal responses to the books in Ms. Roberts' and Ms. Jennings' groups (written after all of the discussions were completed); and (d) copies and photographs of several book-related projects done by Ms. Roberts' students. All documents were examined in order to obtain further evidence regarding the teachers' perspectives and practices.

Data Analysis

The researcher used the principles of analytic induction (Erickson, 1986) to guide analysis of the data corpus. Patterns were searched for and identified in observational field notes, discussion
transcripts, interview transcripts, and relevant documents. Evidence from each case study was compared across the multiple data sources in order to triangulate emerging patterns (Erickson, 1986; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Patton, 1990). In particular, patterns in the teachers' and students' talk within the focal literature groups, in the teachers' stated perspectives, and in the students' stated perspectives on the focal groups were noted and categorized. The researcher generated assertions about the talk in each teacher's literature group discussions, and those assertions were continually checked against the data base for confirming as well as disconfirming evidence (Erickson, 1986).

To more specifically describe and categorize the content and quantity of teacher and student talk in the observed literature group discussions, a coding system was developed. Two sources influenced the codes that emerged: the discussion data itself, and the coding systems used in other studies of literature discussions. The next section contains a detailed explanation of the discussion coding system.

The researcher used Microsoft Word for Windows, Version 2.0 (1991), a word processing program, to assist with the management of the data collected. The program facilitated the storage and retrieval of the data corpus as well as the sorting of coded data, thus increasing the efficiency of data analysis procedures.

**Discussion Coding System**

**Theoretical Framework**

A coding system was developed to characterize the content and quantity of teacher and student talk in the focal literature group
discussions. Broadly speaking, the discussion analysis was approached from a sociolinguistic perspective. The researcher believes that classroom communication systems are socially constructed by teachers and students and that these communication systems influence how teachers and students use language to approach teaching and learning tasks (Barnes, 1976; Cazden, 1988; Green & Wallat, 1981; Wells, 1986). In addition, previous theories and research related to talk in classrooms framed the researcher's approach to the observed discussions.

Research on classroom discourse has indicated that teachers tend to dominate the talk (Barnes, 1976; Cazden, 1988; Wells, 1986), pausing only to allow students to "fill in slots" at teacher-designated points in a lesson (Barnes, 1976). Tharp and Gallimore (1988) describe the most common method of teaching as the "question-answer" recitation. Although collaborative dialogues with more capable others can enable children to organize their thinking and to accomplish tasks that they are not yet able to do alone (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978), such dialogues are apparently rare in most classrooms. Instead, a "transmission view" of education underlies typical patterns of talk in school (Barnes, 1976; Wells, 1986). The transmission view suggests that the teacher's role is to distribute knowledge. Conversely, the student's role is to passively receive that knowledge and to use language to present what s/he has learned. Teachers who subscribe to the transmission view tend to exhibit a "lack of reciprocity" in their interactions with students, failing to take into account student perspectives on a topic (Wells, 1986). This lack of reciprocity gives
students few opportunities to use oral language to make connections between their everyday "action knowledge" and the new, "school knowledge" they encounter in the classroom (Barnes, 1976).

The transmission view appears to influence how literature is discussed in the classroom as well (Beach & Hynds, 1991). Many teachers approach the reading of literature as a quest for the "correct interpretation," and they use an "inquisition mode" to assess students' understandings of books (Eeds & Wells, 1989). On the other hand, in several recent studies teachers implemented literature discussion groups in elementary level settings and used more collaborative, facilitative strategies to engage students in literary dialogues (Anzul, 1988, 1993; Crawford & Hoopingarner, 1993; Crouse, 1987; Eeds & Wells, 1989; O'Flahavan, Stein, Wieneck, & Marks, 1992; Paille, 1991).

Thus, in this study the researcher was interested in learning whether or not the three teacher participants used traditional "inquisition mode" or question-answer recitation strategies for discussing books with students, or if other patterns of talk emerged from the discussion analysis. Consequently, an analysis of the content and quantity of teacher talk and student talk during the literature group sessions was undertaken. The process of analyzing the audiotaped discussions, including the development of a coding system, is discussed next.

**Discussion Analysis Process**

After each observed literature discussion, the researcher wrote observer comments (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992), thus beginning the process
of data analysis. Next the researcher listened to the audio tape of each discussion (a total of 24) and did a rough transcription, recording the gist of student and teacher remarks. The content of the talk was the focus. While transcribing, the researcher also characterized student and teacher remarks with descriptive notes. These descriptive notes formed the rudiments of the discussion categories that were developed to code a subset of discussions chosen for in-depth analysis. During the analysis process, the researcher also looked at discussion categories developed by other researchers to codify literature discussions. These coding systems proved to be useful as the researcher worked to categorize the talk in the group discussions observed for this study. In particular, the coding systems devised by Marshall (1989) and Eeds and Wells (1989) served as models for ways to characterize discussions of literature in classroom settings.

After completing rough transcriptions of all 24 discussions, the researcher reviewed the rough transcripts, descriptive notes, and observer comments and noted emerging patterns in the content of the talk for each group. Additionally, preliminary assertions that characterized student and teacher talk in the discussions for each group were made. As previously noted, emerging patterns and preliminary assertions were shared with each teacher participant in a member check interview. Thus, the teachers had the opportunity to provide their perspectives on the researcher's analysis.

Next the researcher reread the discussion data and began to develop specific categories and codes to identify emerging patterns of
talk in the discussions. Following Marshall's (1989) example in his analysis of classroom discussions of literature at the secondary school level, the researcher used a communication unit, or utterance, as the basic unit of analysis. An utterance stands for an identifiable remark on a single subject (Marshall, 1989, p. 4). Utterances have "the force of a sentence" but may be as short as a single word like "okay" or "yeah" (Marshall, 1989, p. 4). In the study reported here, participants' voice intonations and pauses on the discussion audio tapes were used to segment the talk into utterances on full transcripts of selected discussions. Punctuation end marks (periods, question marks, or exclamation points) designated completed utterances on these transcripts. Sample utterances include the following:

Ms. Roberts: "Okay, Kelly?" (R5, p. 4)

S (Mary): "So that isn't the best memory." (S4, p. 47)

S (Tony): "He [Burton] just forgets about the traps." (J4, p. 55)

The section entitled "In-Depth Analysis of Selected Discussions" provides further information about utterances. The categories developed to characterize the utterances recorded in this study are described next.

**Discussion Categories**

For the purposes of this study three categories, each with a set of specific codes, were created to characterize the discussion utterances. Feedback from peer debriefers (one of whom also served as a second rater) helped the researcher to clarify definitions of the codes within each category. (The roles of the peer debriefer and the second rater are
discussed in the "Credibility and Trustworthiness" section of this chapter.) The discussion categories are as follows: Category I - content of the utterance; Category II - kind of meaning construction evidenced in the utterance; and Category III - function of the utterance. Descriptions of the discussion categories follow. Definitions of the specific codes within each category are presented in Chapter V, along with findings from the analysis of each teacher's discussions.

**Category I - Content.** Category I was developed to identify the content of teacher and student talk during the discussions. Codes such as Text, Personal, and Conversation Maintenance were devised to describe what was said during the literature group sessions. The Conversation Maintenance code was created by Eeds and Wells (1989) in their analysis of fifth and sixth graders' small group discussions of literature led by teachers-in-training. The code reflected to what extent participants showed engagement with each other, and the researcher found it to be well-suited to the discussions observed for this study.

**Category II - Kind of Meaning Construction.** A second category was used to further characterize the content of teacher and student talk. Category II codes such as Describing, Inferring, and Reflecting designated the kind of meaning construction evidenced in some of the discussion utterances. Category II resembled the "kind of reasoning" codes Marshall (1989) used in his discussion analyses. Two of the teacher participants in this study themselves stated that one their goals for literature group discussions was for students to go beyond low level comprehension and to read a book critically; thus, codes such as
Marshall's which identify kinds of meaning making were suitable for this study. Additionally, proponents of the use of literature discussion groups in elementary classrooms maintain that these groups are forums in which children can critically interpret a literary work, engaging in "grand conversations" (Peterson & Eeds, 1990). Thus, the researcher felt it appropriate to explore the kinds of meaning construction observed in this study's discussions.

**Category III - Function.** A third category, function of an utterance, was included. The three function codes were as follows: statement, question, and tag or rhetorical question. Category III was primarily intended to document to what degree the teachers used questions as a strategy for guiding or controlling the discussions. Additionally, the researcher had noted in preliminary analyses of the discussions that one of the teachers seemed to periodically ask her students tag or rhetorical questions. These questions were really statements in question form, because they typically signaled only one possible response. Thus, along with statement and question codes, the researcher added a third code for the function of utterances, tag or rhetorical questions.

**In-Depth Analysis of Selected Discussions**

**Selection and transcription process.** The researcher selected three discussions from each group -- the first, middle, and last -- for in-depth analysis using the coding system. Purposefully sampling the first, middle, and last discussions of the groups enabled the researcher to examine how each teacher began, sustained, and concluded
discussions of a single book. The researcher transcribed the nine selected discussions in full, producing over 600 pages of transcripts. The audio tapes of these discussions were listened to repeatedly in order to render a best effort word-for-word transcription of each discussion. (Sample transcript excerpts are included in Appendix E.) The only parts of the selected literature group meetings that were not transcribed word-for-word were group read alouds of a chapter in the books. If, however, discussion turns were interspersed throughout a group read aloud, they were transcribed in full. As nuances in the discussions were noted during the transcription process, discussion codes within each category were refined. Procedures for marking the transcripts are discussed next.

**Procedures for marking transcripts.** The transcripts were organized by speaker turns. A speaker turn consisted of an audible utterance or utterances made by a teacher or student who held or shared the floor during a discussion. On the transcripts each speaker turn began with a speaker tag -- a capital letter (T for teacher or S for student) and an initial (if a student) in parentheses. Each utterance in a multiple utterance turn was coded separately, as utterances were the unit of analysis. Incomplete/unfinished utterances with identifiable content were also coded.

Overlapping talk and interruptions were common during the discussions. Each speaker's audible utterances made during simultaneous speech were transcribed and designated as turns. When a speaker was interrupted but continued to speak through the
interruption, his or her utterance(s) was counted as a single turn. When a speaker momentarily yielded the floor when interrupted, then resumed speaking, his or her remarks made before and after the interruption were counted as separate turns.

To indicate that a speaker was interrupted or overlapped by the next speaker on the transcript, dashes were typed near the point of interruption. Thus, if a speaker was interrupted in the middle of a phrase, the researcher typically finished transcribing the speaker's phrase, typed a dash, then transcribed the interrupter's utterance. If the first speaker continued to talk during the interruption, the rest of his or her utterance(s) followed the interrupter's utterance on the transcript. To indicate that the first speaker continued to talk through an interruption, the researcher marked his or her continuing turn after the interruption with a lowercase speaker tag (t for teacher or s for student) and the word "continuing". The transcript segment below illustrates how interrupted or overlapped turns were marked:

S (A) - But um, it's the badger's hole,--
S (T) - He's [Ben's] defenseless.--
s (A) - [continuing] it's the badger's home, and he's afraid that the badger's gonna hurt him. (Ms. Jennings' group, Discussion 4, p. 34)

In this transcript segment, Anne's (A) interrupted statement was counted as one speaker turn because she continued to talk during Tony's (T) interruption.
The transcripts were also divided into episodes. Episodes were a series of speaker turns on a topic (Marshall, 1989). As did Marshall, the researcher only marked episode boundaries when a participant explicitly moved the discussion on to a new topic. For example, in the fourth discussion for Ms. Scott's group, the teacher initiated a new episode by stating, "Alright, in the next chapter we were reading about the 'Country Club'' (p. 32). Marking episode changes on the transcripts enabled the researcher to examine how and to what extent the teachers, or the students, explicitly initiated new topics during the discussions. Dividing the nine transcripts into episodes also created meaningful segments of discussion for use with the second rater. The process of coding the nine selected discussions is described below.

**Coding procedures.** The coding system was applied to the transcribed discussions. The researcher printed copies of the discussion transcripts and hand-coded them, utterance by utterance. Each utterance within a multiple utterance turn was coded separately. Because group discussions are interactive and "what individuals say needs to be viewed in light of what other members of the group are saying" (Galda, 1983, p. 4), each utterance was coded with consideration given to its context (i.e., preceding and following utterances). Throughout the coding process the researcher cross-checked coding decisions across the discussions in order to maintain consistency in applying codes to utterances. Furthermore, after each discussion was coded the researcher read through the discussion again to check coding decisions against the code definitions.
Sorting and counting codes. Next, codes were entered into the computer version of the transcripts for sorting and counting using Microsoft Word for Windows, Version 2.0 (1991). This entry process gave the researcher another opportunity to check the consistency of coding decisions within and across the discussions. (Sample coded transcript segments are provided in Appendix E.) In their analyses of literature group discussions, Eeds and Wells (1989) calculated the percentage of utterances for each of their discussion categories. This measurement provided an indication of the type and frequency of utterances made by both students and teachers during discussion group sessions. Similarly, in this study the researcher summed the total number of teacher utterances, then student utterances, in each discussion code across the three coded discussions of each teacher. Then percentages of both teacher and student utterances in each code were calculated. Thus, the percentages represented an average for each group's three coded discussions. These mathematical computations helped to determine patterns in teacher talk and student talk (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Additional information on how discussion utterances were tallied is provided in Chapter V. Thus, a quantitative analysis of selected discussions complemented the qualitative analysis of the data corpus.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Several criteria for evaluating a qualitative research effort were used to establish the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.
Specifically, the following criteria were used: triangulation, progressive subjectivity, negative case analysis, member checks, and peer debriefing. Additionally, the researcher enlisted the help of a second rater to verify the utility of the discussion coding system. Each of these criteria are discussed below.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation involves collecting and analyzing multiple data sources in order to substantiate and cross-check emerging patterns (Erickson, 1986; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Patton, 1990). In this study the researcher gathered and analyzed data in the form of observational field notes, audio tapes and transcripts of discussions and interviews, and related documents. For example, patterns in teacher and student talk in the observed discussions were checked against teacher and student perspectives on the discussions that were shared in interviews.

**Progressive Subjectivity**

Researchers employ the process of progressive subjectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) when they continuously monitor their contributions to the construction of the contexts they study during the course of their research. They are alert to their own biases (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 147), and they maintain a reflexive awareness of their possible influence on the research setting (Ball, 1990). In this study the researcher reflected on her own role in the process of data collection and analysis in her field notes journal. Additionally, she included a code in her discussion category system which acknowledged and
documented her presence in the focal literature group sessions. As Ball (1990) writes, "self-awareness provides the mechanism for analysis of data within the fieldwork process and the evaluation of the adequacy of data outside of the immediacies of fieldwork" (p. 158).

**Negative Case Analysis**

Negative case analysis is akin to Erickson's (1986) notion of searching for evidence that disconfirms evolving assertions. Guba and Lincoln (1989) describe negative case analysis as a process of continually revising hypotheses until they account for all known cases. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) also recommend a search for negative cases to improve trustworthiness (p. 147). As noted earlier, the researcher checked evolving assertions/hypotheses against the evidence in the data corpus to search for negative cases (disconfirming evidence) as well as for confirming evidence.

**Member Checks**

In order to gain a fuller understanding of the participants', or insiders', perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Erickson, 1986; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Patton, 1990), the researcher conducted member checks (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) with the three teachers. According to Guba and Lincoln, member checking involves testing developing data categories and interpretations with participants. They state that member checking gives the respondent... the chance to correct errors of fact or errors of interpretation; [and it] provides interviewees
(informants, respondents) the chance to offer additional information, especially by allowing them to 'understand' the situation as a stranger understands it. (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 239)

In this study the researcher shared preliminary assertions about the observed discussions and emerging patterns in teacher and student talk during the discussions with the teacher participants, inviting their responses. Additionally, each teacher was asked to read and respond to a drafted portion of Chapter IV that described her background, classroom context, perspectives on literature groups, and student participants.

**Peer Debriefing**

Lincoln and Guba (1989) define peer debriefing as the process of testing tentative research findings with a disinterested peer. This procedure enables the researcher to explore the viability of evolving assertions, interpretations, and analyses with an impartial third party. The researcher enlisted the help of two fellow doctoral students, both engaged in qualitative research work, to serve as peer debriefers. The first colleague, Brenda Harvey, worked with the researcher on the early stages of her discussion category system, providing feedback on the comprehensibility of the system. The second colleague, Elaine Lehman, served as a peer debriefer throughout the duration of the data collection and analysis process. As the researcher journeyed through the data corpus, she periodically discussed her developing ideas and impressions with Elaine. In these conversations Elaine asked questions,
challenged the researcher's thinking, and gave valuable insights. Additionally, Elaine worked closely with the researcher to elucidate and clarify each of the discussion codes before the researcher applied them to the discussion data. Elaine also served as the second rater for the researcher's discussion coding system. The procedures for determining interrater reliability are discussed next.

**Second Rater**

In order to test the viability of the discussion coding system developed in this study, a second rater was asked to independently code several discussion episodes. Following an intensive training session with the researcher, the second rater (Elaine) was given 6 randomly chosen episodes (2 from each group) from the 9 discussions selected for in-depth analysis. Elaine independently coded each utterance in the episodes for Categories I, II, and III. Agreement between raters (the researcher and Elaine) across the 6 episodes averaged 84%.

**Definitions of General Terms Used in the Study**

Definitions of the discussion categories and codes used in this study are presented in this chapter and in Chapter V. Descriptions of the credibility and trustworthiness criteria applied to the study, such as member checking, are given in this chapter as well. The researcher also uses several general terms throughout the study. These general terms are defined below.
**Literary understanding.** The term literary understanding is used broadly in this study to refer to personal interpretation of and response to a story; literal comprehension, or grasp of denotative meanings; and knowledge of literary conventions (such as theme or author's use of foreshadowing). Readers often draw upon personal knowledge and experiences to make sense of a literary work; thus different readers may have different interpretations of or responses to the same piece of literature. Readers may also come to understand themselves and/or aspects of the human condition better as a result of reading literature, particularly when they make connections between a story and their own lives. Furthermore, readers may reflect on their "transactions" with a text; that is, they may think about how their feelings and experiences, as well as cues from the text itself, evoked the particular literary work they read (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1983).

**Literature-based instruction.** Literature-based teaching and learning, in its broadest sense, consists of instructional practices and student activities that involve the use of unedited texts such as novels, poems, and informational books (Zarillo, 1989). Many differing interpretations of "literature-based reading" exist (Hiebert & Cole, 1984; Huck, 1992; Zarillo, 1989). For example, some teachers use core sets of novels that the whole class reads as the basic materials of their reading programs (Zarillo, 1989). Other teachers allow students more choice in terms of the literature that is read in class (Hiebert & Cole, 1984; Huck, 1992), and they may use literature in all curricular areas (Huck, 1992).
Realistic fiction. Realistic fiction is a genre of literature defined as "imaginative writing that accurately reflects life as it was lived in the past or could be lived today" (Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1993, p. 527). Works of realistic fiction are thus set in the realm of the possible, and they include present day stories, or contemporary realistic fiction, as well as stories set in the past, or historical fiction.

Response. Response "refers to what happens in the mind of the reader or listener as the story or poem unfolds"; in addition, response "refers to any outward sign of that inner activity, something said or done that reveals a reader's thoughts and feelings about literature" (Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1993, p. 54). Chapter II contains a discussion of reader response theory and research.

Small group discussions of literature. Small group discussions of literature are gatherings of less than whole class-size groups of students, with or without the teacher, to talk about a commonly read book or to share individually read books with others. In this study and in much of the previous research on literature discussion groups, group size typically averages between three and eight students.

Utterance. An utterance, or "communication unit," is an identifiable remark on a single subject (Marshall, 1989, p. 4). Utterances have "the force of a sentence" but may be as short as a single word like "okay" or "yeah" (Marshall, 1989, p. 4). An utterance was the basic unit of analysis for the audiotaped discussions that were transcribed and coded in this study.
Limitations of the Study

The literature group discussions observed for this study revealed how each teacher led a series of small group discussions situated in a particular time and place with a particular configuration of student participants. Based on what the teachers reported to the researcher, it appeared that certain aspects of the teachers' strategies during the discussions were non-situation-specific ways of conducting literature groups; however, other aspects of their strategies were surely situation and context specific. For example, all three teachers alluded to the fact that how they conducted literature group discussions depended on the particular students and/or on the students' degree of experience in participating in such groups. Thus, the strategies and patterns noted in the discussions observed for this study are not necessarily generalizable in terms of each teacher's overall discussion group practices. The observed literature discussions were snapshots rather than comprehensive accounts of each teacher's literature discussion group practices. Similarly, the small number of participants in this study precludes generalizations about elementary teachers' implementations of literature discussion groups.

Another limitation of the study was the fact that nonverbal responses during the group discussions could not be systematically documented given the methodology used. Some nonverbal behaviors were noted, such as the practice of hand-raising to gain a discussion turn; however, since the discussions were audiotaped, the researcher's observational notes focused largely on recording who was saying what.
rather than on nonverbal behaviors (e.g., facial expressions). Given the number of speakers and the degree of overlapping talk that occurred in the groups, the researcher could not attend to all nonverbal behaviors. Thus, some aspects of the participants' responses to the books and/or to the discussions were not accounted for.

Finally, the researcher recognizes that examining overall classroom discourse patterns can enrich understandings of small group discussion processes (Smagorinsky & Fly, 1993). This study was not designed to thoroughly explore elements of the larger classroom context that might have been related to the patterns of talk observed during the focal group discussion sessions.

Summary of Methods

Qualitative methods were used over a five month period to prepare case studies of three teachers and their students involved in regularly scheduled small group discussions of a realistic fiction novel. The corpus of data consisted of observational field notes, transcripts of audiotaped discussion sessions, transcripts of audiotaped interviews with the teachers and discussion group students, and any applicable documents. The researcher used a computer program to facilitate management of the data. The data were analyzed using the process of analytic induction, a category system was developed to characterize the patterns of talk in the focal group discussions, and comparisons were made across the three case studies. Chapters IV and V present the findings of the study.
CHAPTER IV

THE THREE CLASSROOMS:
DESCRIPTIONS OF THE CONTEXTS FOR DISCUSSION

Introduction

The findings of this study are reported in two chapters. To provide context for the study, descriptions of the settings for the focal group discussions are given in this chapter. Furthermore, to address research question 2a., each teacher's perspectives on the purposes and functions of literature discussion groups in her classroom are presented. Since it was expected that the teachers' perspectives would influence both the structuring of the observed groups and the kinds of interactions that ensued, teacher views were an important part of the context for discussion. Thus, Chapter IV contains descriptive background information on the participants, school, classroom, children's book used, and discussion format for each literature group observed. The remainder of the research questions are addressed in Chapter V. Specifically, in the next chapter the researcher presents findings on the observed discussions, on relationships between the teachers' practices and perspectives, and on the student participants' views on the discussions.
Audiotaped interviews with both teacher and student participants, as well as field notes of classroom observations and informal conversations with the teachers, comprise the data for this chapter. Quotation marks indicate specific terms used by the participants, as well as statements made by them. Descriptions are limited to observations of literature-related events and perspectives. Summary tables on the teachers and settings are presented at the end of the chapter.

Classroom 1: Dana Roberts

**Description of the Setting and the Teacher**

**The School**

Ms. Roberts taught at Briarwood Elementary, a school located in a small rural community on the outskirts of a midwestern metropolitan area. The enrollment was approximately 200 students, predominantly Caucasian, in grades K-5. Most of the students came from middle class or upper middle class backgrounds. With the support and encouragement of the building's principal, the teachers in the school were beginning the process of replacing their more traditional basal and textbook driven teaching methods with whole language and literature-based approaches. (The term "whole language" was used by both the principal and Ms. Roberts.) The school library contained several one-title sets of children's books for classroom use.
The Teacher's Background

Ms. Roberts had been teaching for 13 years, 6 at Briarwood. During her career she had taught grades 3, 4, 5, and combination 3/4 classes, and she had been a substitute teacher at the middle school level. At the time of the study Ms. Roberts was working on a master's degree in curriculum and instruction. During the period of the study she also attended a conference for teachers on writing in the classroom.

When asked about her classroom reading program, Ms. Roberts said that she was in her third year of converting to a whole language approach. During an interview the researcher asked Ms. Roberts to explain what whole language meant to her. She asserted that it meant integrating literature into all subject areas, using fiction and nonfiction books instead of textbooks, integrating the subject areas, and doing units of study. She also stated,

Next year I want to do even more theme and literature-wise with very little [basal use], unless I just have somebody that really needs a lot of basal work, I don't plan on using it as much if at all, if possible. I won't be completely out of it; I know I'll have to have some things out of it, but next year I hope to even be another step further, plus I want to go into more with portfolio assessment with them [the students], so, each year I'm adding one more little cog on.

The researcher noted that during interviews and classroom observations, Ms. Roberts used several terms and techniques often associated with whole language and literature-based approaches to
teaching, such as "reading/literature conferences," "literature logs" (i.e., response journals), "sustained silent reading," "author study," "writing process," and "writing workshop."

Ms. Roberts appeared to be gradually replacing more traditional approaches to teaching, such as the use of basals as the core material for reading instruction, with whole language approaches. She noted, however, that "I use our basal yet as like a reinforcement for some skills." She explained that some of her students had scored below the mastery level on the CTBS (Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, a standardized test used by the district) and that she needed to use the basal "to work with them on those special skills that we really need to master." Thus, Ms. Roberts engaged her students in literature-related as well as basal-related activities. The classroom environment is described in more detail below.

The Classroom Context

Ms. Roberts' grade 3/4 class consisted of 28 students (all Caucasian); specifically, there were 9 third graders (5 girls and 4 boys) and 19 fourth graders (5 girls and 14 boys) in the room. Eight of the fourth graders had also been students of Ms. Roberts' the previous year. Each student in the room had his/her own desk. The desks were flexibly arranged in large or small clusters, with some isolates located in several spots around the room. During classroom visits the researcher observed children, independently or in groups, engaged in various activities on the floor as well as at their desks or at a computer table.
Several commercially-made educational posters were displayed on the walls of the room. One of the posters was entitled "Talking About Books"; on it was a list of book response questions such as "Who is your favorite character? Why?". One corner of the classroom was labeled the "Reading Corner"; several children's chapter books were located on a shelf in this small area. Additionally, a poster above a desk on one side of the room was entitled "Author of the Month"; on the desk were several books by the designated author. Each month the children were encouraged to read books by the "Author(s) of the Month" chosen by Ms. Roberts.

Encouraging her students to read books, especially chapter books, was a primary goal of Ms. Roberts'. Concerning the fourth graders, Ms. Roberts stated during one interview, "I've gotten quite a few of my fourth graders into reading now this year with chapter books." On the other hand, she reported that many of the third graders were intimidated by chapter books and had not read them prior to their entry into her room. She strove to introduce these students to simpler, beginning chapter books, such as those written by David Adler and Patricia Reilly Giff. As well as chapter books, the researcher observed individual students reading informational books, Walt Disney books, and basal reader stories. In addition, twice a week the students had "Reading Club." For this activity parent volunteers came to the classroom, took individual children out in the hallway, and listened to them tell about and read from library books or books brought from home. Ms. Roberts' class was also involved in the "Book It" program. In
this program, sponsored by a restaurant chain, pizza was the incentive for students to read a certain number of books each month.

Concerning reading in Ms. Roberts' room, the researcher noted the following in her field notes during one visit:

Many students in Dana's classroom seem excited about reading. Some show Dana books they have found/are reading, some read silently when they have finished their work, and Michelle, without being asked or prompted, was eager to tell me about a chapter book she was reading (Field notes, Entry 20, 11-18-92).

Overall, the classroom context reflected the ongoing transitions in Ms. Roberts' teaching approach. During observations by the researcher, students were seen independently reading children's books at their desks or on the floor, listening as a group to Ms. Roberts read aloud a picture book, and gathering as a whole class to brainstorm writing topics and to share in-progress written stories. The researcher also saw Ms. Roberts group students by grade level and use basal readers and language textbooks to conduct guided lessons. These lessons focused on such skills as using context clues, identifying proper nouns, and writing complete sentences.

Even in these limited classroom observations a consistent pattern in the teacher's interactions with students was evident. When conducting activities or lessons, Ms. Roberts frequently related school topics to students' prior experience or background knowledge. For example, after reading the picture book *Amazing Grace* to the class, Ms. Roberts asked the children if they, like Grace, had ever been told that
they could not do something that they wanted to do. A discussion followed in which various students and Ms. Roberts shared personal stories of experiences they had had that were similar to Grace's experience in the book. This pattern of connecting personal knowledge with school learning was also reflected in the focal literature group discussions and is addressed in more detail in Chapter V.

Ms. Roberts' Perspectives on "Literature Study" Groups

Interview data were gathered to reveal each teacher's perspectives on literature discussion groups. (See Appendix B for sample interview questions.) Ms. Roberts' views on the purposes and functions of literature groups in general are summarized below. Her perspectives on the particular discussions observed for this study are presented in Chapter V.

Doing a "literature study" with groups of students was a relatively new component of Ms. Roberts' teaching repertoire at the time of the study. As noted earlier, the year of the study was the third year in which she was implementing whole language and literature-based approaches in her classroom.

When asked what influenced her decision to use literature study groups, Ms. Roberts explained: "I started with just as a whole class group [for literature discussion], and then it just seemed like you couldn't really concentrate and work with, hear from everybody. And so many of them won't talk out if they're in the whole group." Ms. Roberts said that with the smaller groups "you get more one-on-one with them, and you get so much better response. And I think you can
see that they really understand it [the story] better." Furthermore, Ms. Roberts stated, "you can watch the level of the book you're using too, because, if I were going to use one book for the whole entire class, I have to sort of gear it to one certain level that I feel everybody'll be fairly comfortable with."

As well as explaining why she decided to use literature study groups in her classroom, Ms. Roberts shared her goals for student talk and learning in the groups. She wants students "to experience real literature and different genres," to read books that they may not have picked up on their own, and to enjoy literature. More specifically, Ms. Roberts expects literature group participants to do the following: (a) make predictions at the outset of the story; (b) talk about plot, characters, and setting; (c) note new vocabulary and talk about word meanings in the context of the text; (d) become aware of the author's writing style; (e) note characters' changes; and (f) see relationships between the books and their own lives. Students were also asked to do a culminating project or projects related to their literature study book.

Ms. Roberts also gave her perspectives on the students' roles and her role during literature study groups. She wants the students to be the leaders in the groups. According to Ms. Roberts, "they're the ones that hopefully will teach each other what they've found out... 'Cause when they're sharing with one another, then maybe someone's gonna say something that the other person hadn't really thought of, and I think that really helps them." In terms of her role during group sessions, Ms. Roberts sees herself as doing the following: "breaking the
ice" and starting the discussions, asking questions when discussions reach a slow point, and sometimes steering students to topics that she wants to cover. Ms. Roberts' role in a literature study also involves choosing the children and book for each group and deciding how much of the book should be read before each group session.

**The Student Participants**

Ms. Roberts reported considering such factors as students' compatibility with each other, their reading level, and a book's appeal to students when selecting children and books for literature study groups. Single-gender groups were not uncommon. Ms. Roberts chose 5 fourth grade girls, ages 9 and 10, to participate in the study. These girls represented all of the fourth grade girls in the classroom, and earlier in the year they had done a literature study together on a "Ramona" book by Beverly Cleary.

Ms. Roberts described the group members as average to above average readers. She stated that most of them had received "straight As" during the last grading period. "They're all good students," she said, "it's just that they're all at different points I think strategy-wise in reading." Specifically, she noted that some had good word attack skills while others, one student in particular, lacked such skills. In characterizing one student as an average reader, Ms. Roberts emphasized that the student did not "really take time to read a lot on her own." Ms. Roberts noted that two of the students were particularly interested in reading and would choose to read on their own during class time, more so than the other three students. Finally, she viewed
some of the participants as quiet and reserved and others as gabby and/or interested in socializing. Three of the group participants had had Ms. Roberts as their teacher the previous year. The other two group participants were new to the building the year of the study. One group member attended enrichment, a district program for gifted and talented students.

From the individual student interviews, the researcher acquired some background information on the students' experiences with and perspectives on reading. (See Appendix C for the individual student interview questions.) All of the group participants reported that they liked to read and that they read books at home. Most usually read chapter books. Michelle emphasized that the ones she read were really thick. Ashley said she read fiction and nonfiction, while Stacy and Tina mentioned reading "Baby-sitters Club" and/or "Girl Talk" books. Tina read science books as well, while Kelly included books from church among her home readings. Additionally, Ashley and Tina read books (i.e., "easy books" and "regular books like 'Berenstain Bears,'" respectively) to younger siblings. Most of the students also said they had family members who liked to read; however, Stacy asserted, "I like to read the most in my family." Most of the children further stated that adult family members read informational materials like directions, magazines, and newspapers; in addition, one student noted that her grandmother read thick chapter books. In summary, the group participants reported having a positive attitude toward reading,
experience with reading chapter books, and family members who read in the home.

**The Book**

Following her typical literature study group procedures, Ms. Roberts chose the book to be read by the focal group. She selected one of the realistic fiction books brought to the initial teacher meeting by the researcher, *Anastasia Krupnik* (1979), by Lois Lowry. Ms. Roberts had not read the story prior to the study, but she said at the meeting (after looking at the book jacket), "I think I'll do that one with the girls, because I could see them really getting into it."

*Anastasia Krupnik* is a ten-year-old girl with "hair the color of Hubbard squash" (p. 1), a secret green notebook in which she keeps an evolving and humorous list of "Things I Love/Things I Hate," and two loving parents who have decided to have a baby -- much to Anastasia's dismay. When her parents tell her that she can name the baby, Anastasia contemplates a rather hideous moniker. Anastasia has a chance to reflect on her feelings when her grandmother dies, and when the baby arrives at the end of the story, Anastasia names him Sam, after her also deceased grandfather. *Anastasia Krupnik* is the first in a series of novels about the irrepressible Anastasia.

**Format of the Discussions**

The focal literature study group met 9 times, 1 to 3 days a week, over a 5 week period to read and discuss *Anastasia Krupnik*. This time frame was apparently typical for literature groups in Ms. Roberts' room;
she reported that she tries to do one literature study per group every six weeks. Ms. Roberts typically asked the student participants to read one chapter before each group session; she also asked them not to read ahead. The children were given class time to read the book (orally as a group, or independently), and they were told that they could take the book home. Additionally, six of the group sessions included oral reading of a chapter, which usually lasted 15-20 minutes. The average time length of each group session (including oral reading) was about 45 minutes.

For each session the literature study group met in the back of the classroom, sitting in chairs arranged in a circle. The researcher also sat in a chair in the circle and placed the audio taping equipment on an extra chair in the center of the group. Other students in the classroom were typically doing seat work, reading silently, or participating in "Reading Club" during the literature study group meetings.

Classroom 2: Helen Scott

**Description of the Setting and the Teacher**

**The School**

Ms. Scott (along with the third teacher participant, Ms. Jennings) taught at Dover Alternative, an elementary school located in an upper middle class suburb of a large midwestern city. The enrollment was over 500 students, predominantly Caucasian, in grades K-5. Dover was an informal school, based on the British integrated day model; a child-centered approach to teaching and learning was the prevailing
philosophy. All of the students in the school experienced a literature-based, as opposed to a basal, reading program. The curriculum was characterized by an interdisciplinary focus, with reading and writing being key components of learning in all areas of study.

The Teacher's Background

Ms. Scott had been teaching at Dover Alternative for 5 years; she had been an elementary teacher for 24 years. During the first 20 years of her career, she taught grades 1, 2, and combination 1/2 classes; the following 4 years she taught combination 2/3 and 3/4 classes. Ms. Scott had a master's degree in informal education (with a background in science) and over 40 hours of course work beyond her M. A. After teaching traditionally for the first two years of her career (she mentioned using "dittos to do vowel sounds and dittos for beginning sounds"), Ms. Scott began converting to an informal approach. As she explained in one interview,

My third year of teaching was kind of wading in the water, getting my feet wet so to speak with some more informal ideas, letting go, letting them make best guesses in spelling and letting them write, letting them read, letting them make roller movies, letting them discover about things.

In terms of using children's literature in her classroom, Ms. Scott said that after working with younger students for 20 years, over the past few years she had had to familiarize herself with chapter books, that is, children's literature suitable for third and fourth graders. Several times during interviews Ms. Scott cited particular children's
books and authors and articulated their specific attributes. For example, she explained that she had chosen to read aloud *James and the Giant Peach* by Roald Dahl to her class because "I knew the characterizations in it were so outstanding"; similarly, she described another book as "a good one about peer relationships." During one interview Ms. Scott stated simply, "I love books. And I think if there's one thing that happens in my classroom, I think kids leave just really loving books." Ms. Scott's classroom environment and "literature program" are described in more detail in the next segment.

**The Classroom Context**

Ms. Scott's grade 3/4 class consisted of 25 students (all Caucasian); specifically, there were 13 third graders (4 girls and 9 boys) and 12 fourth graders (4 girls and 8 boys). Seven of the fourth graders had also been in Ms. Scott's room the previous year. Students in the class were not assigned to individual desks; their belongings were stored in lockers at the back of the room and in plastic bins positioned like drawers in shelves around the room. The classroom work space was flexible. Children carried out various activities, independently or in groups, on a sizable carpeted area and/or at four large empty tables, a computer table, and/or several desks that were sprinkled around the room. Whole class lessons and activities were typically conducted in the carpeted area.

The carpeted area of the room was lined with bookshelves filled with hundreds of children's books (i.e., chapter books and some picture books); Ms. Scott called it the Reading Center. A tag on the spine of
each book indicated the genre of literature to which it belonged. More children's books (e.g., picture storybooks and informational picture books) were displayed on top of shelves and on the chalkboard tray in the Reading Center. Children's magazines, such as "Ranger Rick," were also available for student use. In addition, Ms. Scott had a small cabinet containing a variety of one-title sets of chapter books which were used exclusively for literature discussion groups. The classroom also contained a moveable bookcart filled with informational and reference books.

Literature was used for a variety of purposes in Ms. Scott's classroom. Teacher story time or read aloud (of a chapter, picture, or poetry book) and silent reading were daily events. Ms. Scott explained that silent reading was done for the students' enjoyment, "just so they can love books." Children also did buddy reading of picture books and poems, and they used the poems as models for their own writing. Additionally, students referred to informational books and materials in conjunction with thematic studies. Ms. Scott said of book use in her classroom: "I think we use them in a balanced way. They [students] see the importance. They know how to go to a book to find answers; they use magazines. . . . They know how to use the [informational] books, not just literature." Ms. Scott also asserted that part of her purpose as a teacher "is to introduce children to good writers, expose them to different writers' styles so they start to recognize what's good, what makes a good book and what makes a not so good book. That's how you want to get them into good literature."
The researcher observed several teacher read alouds/story time sessions during classroom visits. Specifically, during the course of the study Ms. Scott was observed reading *James and the Giant Peach*, *The Queen's Nose*, and *Island of the Blue Dolphins* to students. During read alouds Ms. Scott sat in a chair on one side of the carpeted area, and students gathered on the carpet and at desks or tables in and around the carpet. Some children drew pictures related to the story as the teacher read. The researcher noted during read alouds that Ms. Scott read character dialogue with a great deal of expression and that she paused periodically throughout her reading to comment on or ask students questions about the stories. The following is an excerpt from the researcher's field notes on one read aloud session on *The Queen's Nose*:

Helen began [the read aloud] by talking about what had happened in the story the last time they read. A student or students responded to each of Helen's preliminary questions. Helen typically called a student's name and followed it with a question. Here are a few of Helen's questions:

'Ken, do you know what she wished for?'

'Who brought rabbit to the door?'

'Mike, do you remember what her second wish was?'

Mike answered [the last question] and Rick chimed in also. Another boy said, 'I'd wish for infinity wishes.' Helen began reading aloud. Shortly she paused and asked, 'Who's she [character] talking to?' Several students quickly answered, 'the
rabbit.' Helen continued reading. She paused after reading an unusual word and said, 'Wonder what that is? . . . Ned, do you know what that is? . . . Well, it's from Columbia . . . it's some kind of animal.'

Helen read a little more and then stopped to briefly explain what she had read. As she explained, a student or two commented/chimed in on what she was saying. She then continued reading aloud. . . . Helen read some more, then stopped and asked, 'Why was she [character] watching her wrist?' A few students answered, and Helen agreed and continued reading (Field notes, Entry 11, 11-11-92).

Even though the researcher's classroom observations were limited, she did note that many of the questions asked by Ms. Scott during read alouds were similar to the questions she asked during the focal literature group discussions. This questioning pattern is addressed in more detail in Chapter V.

Ms. Scott's Perspectives on "In-Depth" Groups

The researcher collected interview data to learn about Ms. Scott's perspectives on literature discussion groups. (See Appendix B for sample interview questions.) Ms. Scott's views on the purposes and functions of literature groups in general are summarized below. Her perspectives on the particular discussions observed for this study are presented in Chapter V.

Although Ms. Scott had been using literature-based approaches to teaching for most of her 24-year career, the use of "in-depth" reading
groups was a somewhat new component of her program at the time of the study. She had been operating in-depth groups in her classroom for three years prior to the year of the study. Ms. Scott credited Ms. Jennings (the third teacher participant) with introducing her to in-depth groups. She explained that when she began teaching a grade 2/3 class (after teaching first grade and grades 1/2 for 20 years), "I thought there's got to be some way that, instead of conferencing [i.e., individual reading conferences] all the time, that I could pull kids together and do some kind of activity. So that's when she [Ms. Jennings] introduced me to these in-depth reading groups." Ms. Scott had observed Ms. Jennings' students (as well as those of another fifth grade teacher in the building) engaged in adult-like in-depth groups. She had liked the idea of giving children the opportunity to "talk about a book on a different level" and to share a book amongst themselves.

As well as revealing how in-depth groups came about in her classroom, Ms. Scott shared her reasons for doing the groups. These reasons include the following: (a) exposing students to books they are not likely to choose on their own, (b) stretching children to read books that are a little bit harder for them, and (c) giving students confidence in their ability to read a whole chapter book in a relatively short period of time (typically less than two weeks). Ms. Scott specified that in-depth groups read "meaty" books. She said these books "take them [students] a step up from what they're reading anyway. . . . You don't want to pick a book that's below them, as far as their reading ability." In addition, Ms. Scott described meaty books as books with challenging vocabulary
or unusual dialogue, books in which characters have to make decisions, books with situations "where you can apply what you've read to your own life experiences," and books that take students "beyond the realm of what they've experienced." Ms. Scott said that *Number the Stars*, for example, is a meaty book because it is set in another country and it "takes them [students] to a time of World War II, what life was like for children then."

Ms. Scott's reasons for doing in-depth groups are closely tied to her expectations for student talk in the groups. She noted that having small groups (no more than about six students) gives everyone a chance to speak and interact. More specifically, Ms. Scott explained that in-depth group participants are expected to do the following: (a) discuss a book critically; (b) examine the author's techniques and style, such as the use of cliffhangers or foreshadowing; (c) make predictions; (d) question vocabulary ("what did the author mean here?"); (e) explore people's (characters') feelings; and (f) be enthusiastic about what they read. In addition, children are typically asked to do extensions (projects) related to their in-depth books. Ms. Scott normally waits until midyear to begin in-depth groups -- "until we really get people into books," she explained. She said that in the fall "we're just trying to get some reading patterns established."

When asked for her perspectives on the students' roles in the groups, Ms. Scott said she wants the children "to be listening to each other and to be active participants, and to question and comment on what other people say. It doesn't always happen, but that would be my
ideal thoughts as to how they would communicate with one another about what each other said." She wants students, eventually, to be able to talk about a book among themselves.

In terms of her role in an in-depth group, Ms. Scott described herself as doing the following: (a) preparing questions to bring to the group of "things I want them to look for, like in some [books] there's just a lot of foreshadowing"; (b) striving to ask open-ended questions as well as some recall questions; (c) encouraging answers and calling on particular students when necessary to get them involved in the discussions; (d) pointing out vocabulary; and (e) guiding the discussions back to the story when student talk strays to other topics. Ms. Scott pointed out that with the first groups she does in her classroom, she tends to assume a leadership role and to take a directive approach in the discussions. She stated, "you have to be directive in some way to stretch them and to help them grow themselves, what things mean."

Ms. Scott explained that as the children gain experience with in-depth groups, she tends to decrease her directiveness; however, in terms of how she runs the groups, Ms. Scott stated that "it depends on the time of year, it depends on the people that are in the group. It depends on the book." Ms. Scott's role for in-depth groups also involves offering a selection of several books from which students can choose for in-depth reading, placing students in groups, and deciding on the pacing of reading for groups.
The Student Participants

Ms. Scott normally forms in-depth groups based on students' choices of books from a selection of teacher offerings. Based on each student's first or second choice book, Ms. Scott configures the groups. She also typically combines girls and boys, students of varied reading abilities, and third and fourth graders in each group. She stated that the third graders learn from the fourth graders and that the fourth graders serve as models. Although she normally mixes third and fourth grade students together for in-depth groups, she agreed to select a group of all fourth graders for the purposes of the study.

Other than the fourth graders-only stipulation (and the fact that she chose the book to be read), Ms. Scott's other criteria for an in-depth group's makeup were met in the focal group. She selected 4 boys and 2 girls (ages 9 and 10) for the group. Three of the children attended the district's enrichment program for gifted students, and one of the children had previously been enrolled in the Chapter 1 reading program.

Ms. Scott said that all of the group participants were at different reading levels. She described some of the students as average readers, others as strong readers; additionally, she stated that two of children were good conversationalists. She noted that one of the students (a strong reader) was able to talk about a book on a "whole other plane than the other kids," discussing author's style and imagining himself in the story. Ms. Scott was concerned about three of the students in terms of their comprehension abilities; her concerns stemmed from the
results of a district holistic reading assessment she had administered to the children. Speaking of two of these three students in particular, Ms. Scott stated, "when I did the holistic reading assessment, they both just could not tell me what was going on in the story, and really give a complete retelling." The same three students about whom Ms. Scott had concerns were new to her classroom; the other three had participated in in-depth groups with Ms. Scott the previous year.

Through the individual student interviews, the researcher gained some background information on the students' experiences with and perspectives on reading. (See Appendix C for the individual student interview questions.) All of the group participants said that they liked to read, except for one, who reported honestly that she did not really enjoy reading. Like the other children, this student did read at home, "because my parents make me" as she said. Most of the children reported reading chapter books at home. Mary specified that she liked mysteries and "Baby-sitters Club" books; Rick preferred "the Roald Dahl series . . . fiction . . . [and] fairy tales, like Castle in the Attic"; and Mike stated that if he did not want to read a chapter book, he would "pick up a picture book and read that." Eric asserted that he would read "any book that sounds interesting, and they go up to 300 some pages." Most of the students also said they had family members who liked to read. Siblings' book preferences included fantasies, short chapter books, "Boxcar Children" books, scary authors, and Charlotte's Web. Parents' reading fare included magazines, the newspaper, and library books. In summary, the group participants reported that they had experience
with reading chapter books and family members who read in the home. All but one of the students expressed a positive attitude toward reading.

The Book

Ms. Scott chose *Ida Early Comes Over the Mountain* by Robert Burch (1980) as the book to be used by the focal group. The title was one of the novels in Ms. Scott's collection of in-depth book sets. Ms. Scott emphasized that for in-depth groups she usually lets students choose from a selection of about 8 books she offers; thus, the conditions of the study caused her to depart somewhat from her normal procedures. She did state that *Ida Early* met her definition of a meaty book because it was set during the Depression, an unfamiliar time to her students. She also felt that *Ida Early* was a book the children would not have chosen to read on their own. In addition, Ms. Scott said that the students would "think she's [Ida] kind of corny . . . but they'll grow to love her just like the family does. And I think it's real important that we teach children how to be accepting of other people's differences. She's really a different person."

*Ida Early* is a humorous work of historical fiction set in rural Georgia in the 1930s. Ida unexpectedly arrives at the Sutton family's doorstep and is hired as their housekeeper. Before Ida's appearance, the death of the four children's mother and the arrival of their stern Aunt Earnestine had left the family with little cause for laughter. Ida's warm heart, along with her outrageous antics and a penchant for wild exaggerations, soon bring happiness back to the Sutton children and
their father. Along the way, the children learn to accept and appreciate Ida's unique personality and style, even though she is at first ridiculed by their classmates and by others in the story.

**Format of the Discussions**

The focal in-depth group met 8 times over 8 consecutive school days, a 2 week period, to discuss *Ida Early Comes Over the Mountain*. Ms. Scott reported that this 2 week time frame was the norm for her in-depth groups. Ms. Scott asked the student participants to read an average of two chapters before each group session. The children were instructed to do the reading at home. During the second session a student asked if he could read ahead; Ms. Scott explained that she did not want him to do so because when she asked prediction questions, he would already know the answer. The average time length of each discussion meeting was about 30 minutes. For each session the in-depth group sat at a round table in the middle of the classroom. The researcher also sat at the table and placed the audio taping equipment in the center of the table. The other children in the classroom were typically engaged in silent reading during the in-depth group sessions.

**Classroom 3: Rita Jennings**

**Description of the Setting and the Teacher**

**The School**

Like Ms. Scott, Ms. Jennings taught at Dover Alternative, an informal elementary school located in a suburb of a large midwestern
city. Dover was described in the "Classroom 2: Helen Scott" section of this chapter.

**The Teacher's Background**

Ms. Jennings had been teaching at Dover Alternative for 5 years; she had been an elementary teacher for 27 years. Over the span of her career Ms. Jennings had taught each of the elementary grades (first through sixth), and she had taught combination classes (e.g., grades 3/4 and 5/6). She had a master's degree in children's literature and reading and had piloted an informal program with other teachers in a school where she had previously taught. Concerning her approach to teaching, Ms. Jennings stated, "I started out very traditionally and was very unhappy with it. . . . I was very bored with all the textbook, workbook kind of thing." She said that she did use the textbook reader until she began teaching the upper elementary grades. As she put it, "when I went to fifth grade, [I] started out with the [basal] reader and dumped it, and that's when everything went." Ms. Jennings mentioned reading professional books, such as "books coming out of England, like the British integrated day" and open education books, as part of her process of becoming an informal teacher.

In terms of her approach to using children's literature in the classroom, Ms. Jennings described "wide reading" as a key component of her "reading program." For wide reading, students are expected to independently read an average of one chapter book a week from the classroom library. If students choose a book that is not from the classroom library, they are asked to get approval from the teacher.
before reading it for their book-a-week requirement. Ms. Jennings asserted that she places conditions on the children's wide reading choices because she wants them to read books that make them think, books with "meat." She said that when she explains her reading program and the book-a-week requirement to parents at the beginning of the year, she tells them, "if they [children] want to read the 'Baby-sitter Club' or 'Finish Your Own Mystery,' they can do that on their own at home -- in addition to the book a week." Furthermore, Ms. Jennings asserted during one interview,

I know there are teachers who say, well, if you can get them [students] to read anything, it's worth it, and see, I don't agree with that because I think there are enough good books, and enough ways to hook kids on books, that you don't have to do it through stuff that has nothing to it.

During informal conversations with the researcher Ms. Jennings expressed her love of books. She shared that she chooses to read children's books herself and only reads adult books once in a while. Additionally, like Ms. Scott, Ms. Jennings often talked about particular children's books, articulating their specific attributes. For example, she described the writing style in Hatchet as "a real choppy kind of writing; there are sentences that are only one word, and sometimes there are paragraphs that are only one word, and so it's a very different kind of writing and [it] succeeds in building a lot of tension." She emphasized that she tries to help her students become aware of these more sophisticated attributes of books, largely through teacher modeling.
She asserted that teacher read alouds are contexts in which she often does modeling. Ms. Jennings stated that when she models, she talks about what she does as a reader and about "how the writer writes; more the kinds of things that kids don't look at when they just read on their own." Ms. Jennings' literature-based classroom environment is described in more detail below.

The Classroom Context

Ms. Jennings' fifth grade class consisted of 24 students (22 Caucasian children and 2 Hispanic children), 10 girls and 14 boys. At the outset of the research Ms. Jennings stated that she had assigned students to specific seats due to discipline concerns. As the study and the school year progressed, students were given more freedom of movement. During classroom visits the researcher observed children, independently or in groups, engaged in various activities at four large empty tables, a computer table, several desks, and a sizable carpeted area of the room.

Bookshelves lined and extended beyond one side of the carpeted area; more bookshelves jutted out from a second side of the area. These shelves were filled with hundreds of children's chapter books arranged by genre. Two more shelves/bookcases in the room were filled exclusively with poetry books. Another large bookshelf in one corner of the room held a sizable collection of one-title books sets -- Ms. Jennings' "in-depth," or literature discussion group, books.

Reading children's books and writing were routine activities in Ms. Jennings' room. Students were expected to keep a record of their
weekly wide reading fare as well as any books they read in conjunction with discussion groups in their "Reading Notebooks." Ms. Jennings conducted daily teacher read alouds of chapter books in the carpeted area, with students sitting on the carpet or in chairs and desks around the carpet. Ms. Jennings was reading The Hobbit to the class at one point during the study. Students also had SSR (Sustained Silent Reading) time on a daily basis. Additionally, during classroom visits the researcher observed children writing stories, writing poems, talking with Ms. Jennings and with fellow students about their poems, and working on student-made bird books in conjunction with an extensive classwide bird study.

During one classroom visit the researcher observed students editing their bird poems and bird books. The following is a synopsis of part of the researcher's field notes from that visit:

A few children were sitting at a table with Ms. Jennings; others were working independently or in small groups in various places around the room. Small group membership did not remain constant; students clustered together, dispersed, and joined other groups throughout the work period. Ms. Jennings listened to individual students read their poems aloud, and she gave them feedback on their works in progress. Several times she told various children to share or talk about their poems with other students. She made comments such as the following to children: 'talk that over with some people,' 'tell him [another student] what you think is the strongest part and the weakest part [of your
'go around and ask them [other students] what that [line of your poem] means to them' (Field notes, Entry 14, 12/1/92).

Of note during the editing period was Ms. Jennings' practice of encouraging students to talk with other students about their writing. Albeit a small snapshot of the classroom context, this instance of encouraging student-student interactions foreshadowed a recurring pattern in the focal group discussions. Specifically, the researcher noted during the observed literature group sessions that Ms. Jennings repeatedly instructed focal group participants to talk to each other (rather than just to her). This particular pattern in the teacher's talk during literature discussions is addressed in more depth in Chapter V.

Ms. Jennings' Perspectives on "In-Depth" Groups

Ms. Jennings' perspectives, revealed in interviews, on the purposes and functions of literature groups in general are summarized below. (See Appendix B for sample interview questions.) Her perspectives on the particular discussions observed for this study are presented in Chapter V.

Of the three teacher participants in the study, Ms. Jennings was the most experienced in the use of literature discussion groups. She reported using "in-depth" groups in her classroom for more than 11 years.

When asked what influenced her decision to implement in-depth groups as part of her reading program, Ms. Jennings credited professional readings, drawn from experts such as Charlotte Huck, as well as her own experimentation in the classroom. As she explained, "I
just felt like the wide reading is not enough; they [students] need something where they look at the text more carefully than they do on their own." Thus, Ms. Jennings' rationale for doing in-depth groups in addition to wide reading is "to get them to read things and talk about them a little more in-depth where they have to go back in the book, to go back to the book to support what they're saying." Like Ms. Scott, Ms. Jennings described in-depth books, as well as the wide reading books available in her classroom, as those with "meat." These books make students think and "lift" or stretch them as readers.

Ms. Jennings explained that she often puts children in in-depth groups for particular purposes, including the following: (a) to have them look at specific aspects of literature, such as setting, author's style of writing or use of language, and vocabulary; (b) "to move some children who are reading only one genre into some other kind of genre where they'll be talking about it and hopefully maybe broaden their reading base"; and/or (c) to move students into "more complex kind of material" than they are choosing to read on their own. In addition to setting up groups for specific purposes, Ms. Jennings noted that sometimes in-depth groups spring up in her classroom without planning on her part. During the study, for example, Ms. Jennings described a group of boys in her room who were reading, talking about, and passing around a series of books by Brian Jacques. As she said, "it's no kind of set aside time, it's just more informal, but it's a form of in-depth because they're really discussing those books, talking about them together."
Ms. Jennings has a number of expectations for student talk and learning in in-depth groups. She stated, "we definitely try to get at more than the retelling, that lowest level of reading, of comprehension." More specifically, she wants group members to do the following: (a) "stand up and say, 'wait a minute, that's not what I thought that meant'"; (b) justify what they are saying by going back to the book to support or prove a point; (c) ask questions that require more than simple yes or no answers; (d) talk about an author's or authors' choices, devices, and writing style; and (e) "be an active participant in the story -- it's not like television, that it kind of happens to you. Because there are shades of meaning, and people may interpret books a little differently. . . . and some people get a lot more from a book than others." Thus, Ms. Jennings expects students to take on an active, dialectical role in the groups.

Ms. Jennings also noted that she wants in-depth participants to "reach beyond the book." She gave several examples of ways children might reach beyond a book, including these three: reading informational books on a topic related to the in-depth book, making charts of vocabulary, and noting similarities between character relationships and personal experience. The students' role also includes deciding, as a group, how many pages of the book to read for each in-depth group session. Finally, students are expected to share their book with the class through a project or a presentation.

In terms of her role during in-depth group meetings, Ms. Jennings prefers to be a collaborator. As she said, "I like to be able to bring my
questions in as one of the members of the group, rather than as the teacher." When asked how she defined collaborative, Ms. Jennings replied, "I don't want to come to the in-depth group with an agenda." She indicated that she did not want students to feel that the discussions were teacher-question, student-answer sessions. Ms. Jennings asserted that she gets more involved with groups new to in-depth reading and with groups that do not jell. On the other hand, she moves in and out of groups with prior in-depth experience, and she may not even meet with more seasoned groups. When she puts in-depth groups together for specific purposes, Ms. Jennings' role also typically involves selecting the book and the students for each group.

Overall, Ms. Jennings said that she tries to follow the "Rosenblatt model" (i.e., Louise Rosenblatt) when doing in-depth groups. Ms. Jennings explained her perspective on Rosenblatt's model, and she pointed out how she differs from Rosenblatt: "I know that she feels that the teacher should stay out, as much as possible, out of the process, and I do, but there are times, if I'm going into it for a teaching reason, or when I see something that I think kids are not going to pick up on." Although Ms. Jennings believes that it is important to point out aspects of a book that students might miss, she said that "you're not going to pick up on everything, nor should you. Because . . . you just wear it to death and you have to be careful in in-depth that you don't do that to a book."
The Student Participants

Ms. Jennings reported considering such factors as students' reading abilities, their personalities, and their self-concepts when assembling in-depth groups. She said she tries to group students heterogeneously in terms of ability. She emphasized needing to know the children as readers before putting them in a group; as she explained in one interview,

You don't want to place a child in a group to lift him or her [i.e., challenge him/her as a reader] if what it's going to do would be to degrade him or her. So you have to be sure the lifting is a safe lift, and not a lift that would make them look bad in the other kids' eyes, or in their own.

Ms. Jennings also noted that she does not put more than six (or occasionally seven) students in an in-depth group, because beyond six, "people aren't as involved" and they "don't get response time." Additionally, she puts together single-gender groups as well as both-gender groups.

Ms. Jennings chose 4 boys and 2 girls (ages 10 and 11) to participate in the focal discussion group. Five of the children were Caucasian, and one was Hispanic. After the fourth of seven discussion group sessions, one boy withdrew from the group. A third girl, one who had asked to participate in the discussions, joined the group beginning with the fourth session. Thus, there were 4 boys and 3 girls in the fourth discussion, then 3 boys and 3 girls in the latter discussions. Most of the students reported participating in in-depth
groups the previous year; a few had had Ms. Scott (the second teacher participant) as their teacher. Three of the 7 students attended the district's gifted program.

In terms of the participants' reading abilities, Ms. Jennings said that all of the students could comprehend a story "beyond the surface level" (in varying degrees). She described specific aspects of various students' reading abilities. For example, Ms. Jennings stated that one student could summarize, synthesize, and generalize and that she "reaches into a story with her experience. . . . [she] relates the world to the book, her world . . . and she's able to see the characters from an objective point of view." Of another student Ms. Jennings remarked, "[he] reads lots of books and always difficult [ones]. [He] takes on any challenge in reading - wants to, chooses them on his own . . . he likes words, he likes to play with words." Overall, Ms. Jennings viewed most of the students as good, strong, or intense readers. She reported, however, that two of the students sometimes had meaning gaps when they read because of difficulty identifying some words. She also said that a third student did not always "catch the threads and get the right meaning of everything in a book." Finally, Ms. Jennings described two of the group members as shy, another as verbal about books, and two as resistant to authority.

From the individual student interviews, the researcher acquired some background information on the student participants' experiences with and perspectives on reading. (See Appendix C for the individual student interview questions.) The student who withdrew from the
group agreed to be interviewed, so the responses of all seven students are reported here. All of the group participants stated that they liked or "loved" to read; however, two students qualified their answers by saying they enjoyed reading only sometimes. All of the children also said they read at home. Their home reading fare included realistic fiction, fantasy, chapter books, books from school, and library books. Steve noted that he liked to read "long books and ones that are hard to understand, so that I can understand some words that are in those books." John expressed a preference for adventure books. Diane asserted that she did not like to read "books that happened around our time"; instead, she preferred books "that happened like in the sixties or something, or something that happened in the forties, or something that happened in the 1800s."

During the interviews, all of the group participants also stated that they had family members who liked to read. At home older siblings were reading the Tolkein series, "Stephen King books and . . . Mossflower," fiction, mysteries, and the Bible. Parents' book choices included mysteries, romance books, fantasy books, bicycle books, and the encyclopedia. In conclusion, the group members reported having a positive (or mostly positive) attitude toward reading, experience with reading chapter books, and family members who read in the home.

The Book

For the focal in-depth group, Ms. Jennings chose an historical fiction novel by Allan Eckert entitled Incident at Hawk's Hill (1971). The book, a Newbery Honor winner, was one of the titles in Ms. Jennings'
collection of in-depth book sets. As previously noted, Ms. Jennings often selected the book to be read by an in-depth group. During one interview she stated her reasons for choosing the Eckert book:

While this is a realistic fiction [book], it is also based on a real case, based on some fact. And, I thought it would be a challenging book, and it's a book of survival, which we haven't dealt with in read aloud this year, or in any group situation . . . I feel like he's a writer that many children never read . . . He just doesn't have that many books for children. He's an outstanding writer. I guess in a way, this borders on historical fiction and probably could be stretched to fit into the historical fiction genre, so I guess I was trying to kill a lot of birds with one stone!

**Incident at Hawk's Hill** is based on an actual event that took place in Canada in the 1870s. Six-year-old Ben MacDonald, a shy child with a strong affinity for animals, becomes lost after straying too far from his family's farm. On the untamed prairie he is adopted by a female badger, and the two form an extraordinary bond. After surviving an incredible summer with the badger, Ben is finally found by his older brother. Ben's loving family is overjoyed yet incredulous upon his return, particularly when the badger follows him home. The badger takes up residence on the MacDonald farm, a move that ultimately jeopardizes her life.

**Format of the Discussions**

The focal in-depth group met 7 times over a 2 week period to discuss **Incident at Hawk's Hill**. Ms. Jennings reported that this time
frame was typical for her in-depth groups. Ms. Jennings informed the student participants when they met on a Tuesday for the first session that they had until a week from Friday to complete the book. She then told them to decide how much of the book to read before each meeting. The students agreed to read 1-2 chapters a night; they also had some class time to do the reading assignments. The average time length of each group session was approximately 35 minutes.

For the first session the group met at a circular table in the classroom. On subsequent meetings the group met on the floor or at a rectangular table in the carpeted area of the room; additionally, the group met once in the school library, with student participants sitting on cushions on the floor. When the students were on the floor for a session, Ms. Jennings stressed that they sit in a circle; she sat in a chair. For all group sessions the researcher sat where the students sat; for example, if they were on the floor, then the researcher sat on the floor. Audio taping equipment was always placed in the center of the group, either on a table or on the floor. When the focal group met in the classroom, other students were typically working on their bird books, reading silently (SSR), or meeting in other in-depth groups.

The Three Classrooms: An Overview

In Table 2 background information on the three teacher participants is summarized. Then, in Table 3 the two schools are described. Finally, Table 4 presents demographic data on the students in each of the three classrooms. For each class, the number of male and
female students in each grade is specified, and the percentage of students of various races are given. (See also Table 9 in Chapter V for detailed information on the focal literature discussion groups.)

Table 2

Teachers: Background Information

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<td>Reading curriculum</td>
<td>Whole language plus basal</td>
<td>Literature-based</td>
<td>Literature-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yrs. experience with literature groups</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Briarwood</td>
<td>Dover</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>K-5</td>
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<td>Student population</td>
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<td>500</td>
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<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>Middle to upper middle</td>
<td>Upper middle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School program/curriculum</td>
<td>In transition from traditional to whole language</td>
<td>Alternative, literature-based</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

Demographic Data on Students in the Three Classrooms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Grade 5</th>
<th>Race&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M  F</td>
<td>M  F</td>
<td>M  F</td>
<td>C     AA    H</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room 1, Roberts</td>
<td>4  5</td>
<td>14  5</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>100%  --    --</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room 2, Scott</td>
<td>9  4</td>
<td>8  4</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>100%  --    --</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room 3, Jennings</td>
<td>--  --</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>92%    --    8%</td>
<td>24</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>The abbreviations for race are as follows: C for Caucasian, AA for African-American, and H for Hispanic.
Summary

This chapter provided a descriptive context for the analysis and interpretation of observations of the focal literature discussion groups. Specifically, it presented descriptions of the following: (a) the school and classroom settings for the discussions, (b) the teachers' backgrounds and perspectives on the purposes and functions of literature discussion groups, (c) the student participants, and (d) the logistics of the discussions. In the next chapter the researcher addresses the primary focus of the study, the literature group discussions themselves. In Chapter V the researcher also explores the teachers' perspectives in light of their practices, as well as the students' views on the discussion groups in which they participated.
CHAPTER V

THE DISCUSSIONS AND THE PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVES

Introduction

The last chapter introduced the teachers and students who participated in the study. Descriptions of their school and classroom environments as well as their backgrounds were provided, and the teachers' perspectives on the purposes and functions of literature discussion groups were presented. In this chapter the researcher describes the major findings of the study. Specifically, the following research questions which guided the study are addressed:

1. (a) What are the discussion strategies used by each of the three teachers during literature discussion group sessions with students?

   (b) What are the patterns of student talk during small group discussions of literature with each of the three teachers?

   (c) How are the discussion strategies of the three teachers related to the nature of the students' talk within the groups?

2. (b) What are the three teachers' perspectives on the focal group discussions observed for this study?

3. What are the relationships between the stated perspectives and the observed practices of the three teachers during literature group discussions?
4. What are the student participants' perspectives on the purposes and functions of the literature groups?

Additionally, comparisons are made between the three teachers' group discussions and the strategies they used to conduct those discussions. The chapter begins with a presentation of the categories of discussion analysis developed by the researcher to characterize the observed literature group sessions.

Categories of Discussion Analysis

As explained in Chapter III, the unit of analysis for the selected literature discussions was an utterance, the equivalent of a sentence. Each utterance was coded for content, kind of meaning construction, and function (Categories I, II, and III), unless otherwise noted. Table 5 presents the discussion categories applied to the nine transcripts chosen for in-depth analysis. Following Table 5, the researcher defines the codes within each category in more detail and gives examples from the discussion transcripts. The examples are referenced by the teacher (R for Ms. Roberts, S for Ms. Scott, and J for Ms. Jennings) and by the discussion number. Thus, R5 means Ms. Roberts' group, Discussion 5. For the most part, false starts and repeated phrases (e.g., "I mean") within a speaker's turn have been omitted from the examples to improve readability. A dash at the end of a speaker's utterance indicates that s/he was interrupted or overlapped by the next speaker. Samples of coded transcript segments are provided in Appendix E.
Table 5

Categories of Discussion Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category I</th>
<th>Category II</th>
<th>Category III</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
<td><strong>Kind of Meaning</strong></td>
<td><strong>Function</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Text (A)</td>
<td>Describing (1)</td>
<td>Statement (s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author (B)</td>
<td>Inferring (2)</td>
<td>Question (q)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal (C)</td>
<td>Generalizing (3)</td>
<td>Rhetorical or Tag Question (t)</td>
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<td>Process (D)</td>
<td>Evaluating (4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conversation Maintenance (E)</td>
<td>Perspective - Taking (5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignments or Projects (FF)</td>
<td>Reflecting (6)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Researcher Presence (FG)</td>
<td>Unknown (7)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Context (FH)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (I)</td>
<td>Read Aloud (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Numbers and letters in parentheses indicate the code abbreviations used on the discussion transcripts.
Category I, Content of Utterances

Category I characterized the content of the participants' talk during the group discussions. Utterances were given more than one content code when applicable, unless otherwise noted. For example, if a speaker made a connection between the story and personal knowledge in one utterance, the utterance was coded A (Text) and C (Personal). The Category I codes are defined below.

Text (A)
Utterances coded A for content focused on the book itself. They typically contained reference to one or more of the following: characters, events/plot, setting, theme, vocabulary or characters' dialect, literary devices (e.g., cliffhangers, foreshadowing), book cover, title page, table of contents, illustrations, and illustrator. Additionally, utterances in which a speaker read aloud a segment of the text or referred to specific pages during the discussion for the purpose of giving an example, proving a point, or asking/answering a question, were coded A for content. Finally, talk about book-related assignments to be done for the group discussions (e.g., pages to read, examples of characters' dialect to write) was coded A.

Author (B)
Author utterances referred to the author's style of writing, writing choices, or background.

Personal (C)
The C code was assigned to utterances that focused on a speaker's personal opinion or response, personal experience, or prior knowledge.
Utterances coded C were related to the story, to the discussion process, or to assignments to be done for the group discussions. Explanations and examples of personal opinion/response, personal experience, and prior knowledge utterances are provided below.

**Personal opinions/responses.** Utterances were coded personal opinions/responses when they were marked with "I" or "you" (e.g., "I think..."; "What do you think?"). In addition, utterances in which a speaker talked as if s/he was a character in the story, giving an interpretive rendition of what that character might have said, were considered personal response utterances. A change in tone of voice and inflection marked the speaker-as-character utterances. The following are examples of personal opinion/response utterances:

Fred: [referring to the character on the cover of Incident at Hawk's Hill] Well I think um, that he ran away from his parents, you know, for good, because I mean, he's not dressed very well you know, I mean he's got rips in his clothes, and if he went back home his parents would say, 'how'd you get all those rips in your clothes?'. (J1, p. 25)

Tina: I think she [Anastasia] has a green notebook in the park, in her school, and her room. (R9, p. 8)

Ms. S: Oh, you think maybe that's why [Aunt Earnestine is bossy], because she's richer? (S1, p. 23)

Mike: They [the twins] were like--, yeah, they were like, 'I don't know if I'm gonna like this.' (S4, p. 44)

**Personal experience.** When a speaker made a personal experience utterance, s/he typically related an aspect of the story to her/his own life. Examples of personal experience utterances include the following:
Ms. R: [following a series of comments on Anastasia's "Things I Love/Things I Hate" list] Have you ever made a list? (R1, p. 4)

Rick: [following a series of remarks on a pig in the story] I've seen one [pig] at Pet Mart or something and they had a big--
Trisha: Bacon [the name of the pig].--
Rick: Yeah, they have Bacon. (S4, p. 20)

Prior knowledge. In prior knowledge utterances speakers referred to background or general knowledge that they brought to the story. For example, talk about other books, the meaning of vocabulary words in the book, and human nature was considered prior knowledge talk. The following utterances contain references to participants' prior knowledge:

Trisha: [referring to the cover of Ida Earl] The pictures look like Little House in the Big Woods. (S1, p. 2)

Ms. R: [after Ashley finished reading page 49] Okay, before we go on. Does anyone know what hieroglyphics is? (R5, p. 2)

Ms. J: Do you think that, that people do violent things to people that they think can't retaliate, or can't help themselves? (J4, p. 23)

Process (D)

Process utterances involved explanations of, observations, descriptions, or questions about, or reflections on the process of reading, interpreting, or discussing. In addition, explicitly describing or working out group procedures was considered process talk; however, procedural directives given without explanation were not considered process utterances. For example, if a teacher directed the student participants to sit in a circle, her directive was not a process utterance. If she gave the students a reason for the seating arrangement she requested, her utterance was assigned the D code. A statement made by Ms. Jennings during one discussion is an example of a process utterance: "What I
would like to do is for you to close the circle with me outside of it if you would because I want you to talk to one another" (J4, p. 7). Other examples of process utterances include the following:

Tina: . . . And, at first when I read it, when um, I read 'ruler' [i.e., king], I thought it was like a real ruler that you measure something with. (R5, p. 27)

Anne: [referring to the chapters in the book alternating between the humans in the story and the badger] In my pattern, I was right about the pattern that I talked about that I guessed, um, it does go people, and then it talks about the badger [inaudible]-- (J4, p. 5)

Ms. S: What we're going to do, we're gonna look at the first chapter together, we'll do some reading together and then talk about it, and tonight then you'll have an assignment, some pages to read. (S1, p. 6)

Ms. J: What kind of rules do you think should be established so each person can share fully in the discussion? (J1, p. 48)

**Conversation Maintenance (E)**

The Conversation Maintenance code, created by Eeds and Wells (1989, p. 9) and applicable to the discussions observed for this study, was given to utterances which showed how speakers initiated, maintained, and ended the discussions. Such utterances also revealed the group members' engagement with each other. Specifically, conversation maintenance utterances included the following: (a) agreements, acknowledgments, disagreements, and evaluations; (b) restatements of previous remarks; (c) attempts to negotiate meaning; (d) elaboration prompts and clarification requests or statements; and (e) procedural comments. When conversation maintenance signals were attached to utterances that contained other content, the utterances were coded by
the other content as well as with an E. Restatements of previous remarks were coded E only for content, as they did not add new topical information to the discussions. Examples and explanations of the various kinds of conversation maintenance are provided below.

**Agreements, acknowledgments, disagreements, and evaluations.** These forms of conversation maintenance were most often made in response to previous utterances. They typically consisted of or included words such as "yeah," "I know," "um hmm," and "okay" (agree or acknowledge markers); "yeah, but" (partial agree/disagree signal); "but" and "no" (disagree markers); and "right," "good point," and "exactly" (evaluate signals). "Yes-no" utterances in response to "yes-no" questions were coded by the content of the question rather than as conversation maintenance signals. The following discussion excerpt from Ms. Jennings' group contains examples of agree and disagree markers; the comments occurred after a student, Anne, stated that the character Ben had run away:

Diane: No he didn't, he didn't run away.--
John: No he didn't, he wandered--
Diane: He wandered, he wandered around and it started raining--
Anne: Oh, yeah, he wandered away, yeah, but then it-- (J4, pp. 5-6)

In addition, tag and rhetorical questions, which carried an expectation for agreement (e.g., Ms. R: "That's always the best list to make isn't it?", R1, p. 5), were coded as conversation maintenance signals.

**Restatements.** Restatements or rephrasings of previous utterances were another means by which speakers acknowledged or showed agreement with other participants' comments. Additionally, speakers
sometimes restated their own utterances after being overlapped or interrupted by others. Based on a consideration of the context in which such restatements occurred, it appeared that same-speaker restatements served one or more of the following purposes: to emphasize a point, to insure that the utterance had been heard, or to show continued disagreement with another speaker's point of view. In addition, speakers, usually teachers, sometimes repeated questions, apparently for clarification or if the answers given were unsatisfactory or incomplete.

**Negotiations.** Attempts to negotiate meaning were typically marked with the use of "well." The following segment from one of Ms. Scott's discussions shows speakers engaged in a negotiation of meaning as they discussed two different cover illustrations of *Ida Early*:

Rick: Well in your book [Ms. Scott's copy] one of them's older [i.e., one of the children on the cover].
Ms. S: Well I think that's just one of the twins.
Rick: Well, then look at the other twin.
Ms. S: Well, they're dressed alike. He's [one twin] just down on the floor and he's [the other twin] on the chair. (SI, p. 29)

**Elaboration prompts and clarification comments.** Elaboration prompts and clarification requests or statements, usually made by a teacher, were another form of conversation maintenance. Some elaboration prompts were simple "What else?" or "Any other ideas?" questions. Other elaboration questions asked students to explain their responses in more detail. For example, in Ms. Scott's first discussion, Kevin stated that *Ida Early* was like another book, *Summer of the Monkeys*. Ms. Scott responded to Kevin by asking, "Why do you say it's like *Summer of the Monkeys*?" (SI, p. 10). Finally, some conversation
maintenance utterances were made to clarify understanding of what another speaker had said. For example, in Ms. Jennings' first discussion, Steve made this prediction about a character (Ben) based on the cover of the book: "Well he, he might come to see the badger like every time his parents are arguing, or [inaudible]--" (J1, p. 24). In response, Ms. Jennings made the following clarification remark: "Okay, you think that he's made friends with--, people kind of seem to be saying that, that they think he's made friends with it [the badger] and that he might come to see it when he's unhappy?" (J1, pp. 24-25).

**Procedural comments.** Procedural remarks, the last type of conversation maintenance, consisted of the following: distinctive bids for the floor (e.g., Diane: "Can I tell you something you guys!?", J4, p. 11); speaker nominations (e.g., Ms. R: "Okay, Kelly?", R5, p. 30); procedural directives (e.g., Ms. J: "Tony, could you scoot over a little bit--", J4, p. 1); and explicit initiations of new topics (e.g., Ms. S: "Okay. Um, let's look on page 47," S4, p. 25).

**Larger Context (F)**

Larger Context utterances contained references to events or people outside the intimate group discussion context. There were three main types of larger context codes: Assignments or Projects (FF), Researcher Presence (FG), and Classroom Context (FH). Each of the three Larger Context codes are described below.

**Assignments or Projects (FF).** The FF code was applied to talk about book-related assignments, projects, or activities that students were to do outside of the discussion group context. For example, in all of the
discussions participants talked about the reading assignment to be done before the next group meeting. In Ms. Scott's group, the children were asked to record examples of characters' dialect, trickery, and/or exaggerations when they did their nightly reading assignment, and they often shared their findings in the next day's discussion. Ms. Roberts' students spent discussion time sharing ideas for book-related projects they could do once they finished reading Anastasia Krupnik. Ms. Jennings asked her students during the first group meeting to record Incident at Hawk's Hill in their "Reading Notebooks" (journals in which students kept track of and responded to books they read for school). Because the use of Reading Notebooks was part of the classroom routine for all students, talk about them was coded FF.

If utterances coded FF related directly to literary meaning construction or to assignments to be done for the group discussions, they were also assigned other content codes, such as the Text (A) code. For example, the talk in Ms. Scott's group about examples of the characters' dialect found in the nightly reading assignment was coded A and FF. On the other hand, FF utterances that referred only to possible projects to be done after completing the book and that did not involve revisiting the story itself were not assigned other content codes (with the exception of the Conversation Maintenance (E) code when applicable).

Researcher Presence (FG). Qualitative researchers are reflexively aware of their presence and possible influence on the context in which they do their research (Ball, 1990). The researcher created the FG code to acknowledge her presence in the group discussions observed for this
study. The researcher was an observer rather than a participant in the literature discussions; however, the participants occasionally referred to her or addressed her during the group sessions. When spoken to the researcher strove to keep her responses to a minimum and to extract herself from the limelight as soon as possible. The audio equipment and logistics were typical subjects of FG utterances. For example, during the first discussion session of Ms. Jennings' group, the students introduced themselves to the researcher and gave her the pseudonyms they wished to use for the study. Across all of the discussions, talk involving the researcher was infrequent. In the nine coded discussions, FG utterances comprised less than 2% of the total number of utterances. Utterances made by the researcher were coded FG alone for content and were not assigned Category II or III codes because they did not represent patterns in the participants' talk during the discussions.

**Classroom Context (FH).** Occasional interruptions impinged on the focal discussions because they occurred during regular school hours and in the presence of other students. The researcher created the FH code to acknowledge the context in which the discussions occurred. Typically, utterances coded FH involved the teacher responding to or addressing other students in the classroom during discussion group sessions. Overall, the incidence of FH utterances was infrequent. Of the total coded teacher and student utterances for each group, less than 1% were coded FH for Ms. Scott's and Ms. Jennings' groups, and less than 4% were coded FH for Ms. Roberts' group.
Other (I)

Utterances that did not fit any of the other content codes were coded Other. These remarks were often incomplete utterances that did not have enough identifiable content to code; some were comments obviously unrelated to the discussions. For example, in one of Ms. Jennings' discussions a student remarked that she was hungry.

Read Aloud (R)

When a discussion group spent part of the meeting time reading aloud a chapter from the book as a group, each speaker's read aloud turn was given one R code for content. Since read aloud turns did not involve discussion, they were not given any other content codes. Additionally, they were not coded for Category II or III because they were not discussion turns. If speakers stopped reading during a group read aloud to discuss what was read, then their utterances were coded for content as discussion utterances.

Category II, Kind of Meaning Construction

Category II was intended primarily to identify the kind of literary meaning construction reflected in some of the discussion utterances. Specifically, utterances assigned a Text (A), Author (B), Personal (C), or Process (D) code in Category I were also coded for Category II. Additionally, evaluations of other speakers' text-, author-, personal-, or process-related comments were given a Category II code (these evaluations were coded E, Conversation Maintenance, for content).

One Category II code was assigned to each utterance. If an utterance seemed to fit more than one meaning construction code, it was
given the numerically higher code. Higher level codes were inclusive of lower level codes. Assigning only one Category II code per utterance was done to ease coding decisions, to distinguish between the qualitatively different types of meaning construction used by the participants, and to illustrate the extent to which group members went beyond simple describing during the discussions. The first four codes are similar to the "kind of reasoning" codes used by Marshall (1989) in his analysis of whole class discussions of literature at the secondary school level. Marshall's reasoning codes included summary/description, interpretation, evaluation, and generalization. The seven meaning construction codes used in this study are described below.

**Describing (1)**

Describing utterances referred to literal aspects of the text, personal experience, or prior knowledge. When speakers were describing the text, they typically recalled or retold information given in the book. Textual describing also included reading excerpts from the book during the discussion. Additionally, descriptions of book-related assignments to be done for the discussions were given the Describing code. Similarly, the code was assigned to talk which described discussion-related processes and procedures. The following are examples of describing utterances:

Mary: I think she [Ida] was milking a cow. (S4, p. 31)

Mike: [reading from page 137] It said here, 'Oh howdy J. C.,' Randall said 'Oh howdy J. C.' (S8, p. 6)
Anne: Um, last year I was with Mrs. Scott's class, and I was gonna read this book [Incident at Hawk's Hill], but I'd found a different book that I wanted to read. (J1, p. 16)

Ms. R: Now, also, I'd like for you to look back through the chapter and think of some words that were hard for us, and we're gonna talk about some of those vocabulary words. (R1, p. 15)

Inferring (2)

When speakers were inferring, they were moving beyond information explicitly stated in the text to interpret characters or events, to make predictions, to draw conclusions, or to make comparisons within the story (e.g., to compare characters or to consider one character's change over time). The Inferring code was also given to utterances in which one speaker interpreted another speaker's comment. Finally, problem-solving type utterances addressing discussion processes or procedures were assigned the Inferring code. For example, in Ms. Jennings' first group discussion, the students were asked to decide how many pages of the book to read before each group meeting. Their decision-making process included several problem-solving comments that went beyond simple description (e.g., Anne: "you could divide how many days we have to read the book by how many pages there are," J1, p. 33). Examples of other inferring utterances are given below.

Tony: [referring to the character on the book cover] Um, maybe he was an orphan, that's why he's not dressed very well. (J1, p. 24)

Ms. J: What did you think, do you think the badger lived or died? (J7, p. 34)

Steve: She [Aunt Earnestine] probably thinks she can boss everyone around because she's so much richer than them. (S1, p. 23)
Kelly: And um, also, like in the club, instead of wanting friends, maybe she [Anastasia] just wants to be in it because everybody is in it, she doesn't want to be left out, so people make fun of her or something. (R5, p. 23)

**Generalizing (3)**

When participants were generalizing, they were looking beyond particular characters or incidents in the story to discuss people in general or to contemplate broader issues of human nature or the human condition. Additionally, utterances which referred to the theme of the book were considered generalizing remarks. Finally, when speakers compared or contrasted textual elements with personal experiences or prior knowledge, their utterances were given the Generalizing code.

Examples of generalizing utterances include the following:

Ms. J: Is that true to nature that an animal would bite off its own foot? (J4, p. 46)

Michelle: That's what most babies do [i.e., put things in their mouths]. (R9, p. 12)

Anne: I think it's [the story] kind of about how the, the story can draw people closer together, is [sic], family-wise, and-- (J7, p. 59)

Rick: She's [Ida] probably like a Pippi Longstocking. (S1, p. 9)

Eric: She [Ida] looks kind of like a farmer that would go through the cornstalks picking corn, because farmers usually wear like overalls, and like a raggedy shirt, like a plaid shirt or something. (S1, p. 19)

**Evaluating (4)**

Utterances which assessed the "quality of an experience or text" (Marshall, 1989, p. 7) were assigned the Evaluating code. Evaluating utterances also included value judgments about characters' personalities.
or actions, the author's style, or the comments of others. Such utterances often involved issues of good or bad, right or wrong. Finally, utterances in which speakers analyzed the author's style or choices were assigned the Evaluating code. The following are sample evaluating utterances:

Ms. S: Yeah that was funny. (S4, p. 14)

Tina: Like, like whatever his name is, Washburn Cummings, um, she [Anastasia] blames him for saying like she's weird and everything, but it was her fault, because she was trying to show off in front of him. (R5, p. 18)

Diane: I liked, what I like is that he [the author] gave you how you wanted to end it [the story], but I'd like to know more specific [sic, specific] like if he [the badger] died. (J7, p. 32)

Ms. R: That's a good point. (R9, p. 21)

Ms. J: Why did the author need George Burton?
Diane: To make--
Tony: To be the evil guy.--
Anne: You need a bad guy. (J7, p. 42)

Perspective-Taking (5)

At times during the discussions speakers considered the point of view of a character (or author) or imagined what they would have done or felt if they were in a character's position. When speakers marked such considerations or imaginings with "I" or "you," their utterances were assigned the Perspective-Taking code. For example, in one discussion Rick stated, "If I was writing the letter, I wouldn't say, 'if you come back we will be your true friends'" (S8, p. 28). Additionally, when speakers slipped into a character's voice and gave an interpretive rendition of what that character might have said (as opposed to quoting dialogue
from the text), their utterances were coded as perspective-taking remarks. Examples of perspective-taking utterances are provided below.

Diane: Like the badger's like, she was like, I wonder how she felt, I mean, here she had lost all her cubs, part of her foot, and her mate. (J4, p. 39)

Michelle: I would, if I was Anastasia, I would at least try to change my attitude against other people. (R5, p. 26)

Anne: I'd be screaming at Mr. Burton. (J7, p. 28)

Rick: He [Archie, a character's little brother] didn't know who it [Ida] was. He was like, 'who's this big woman above me?' (S4, p. 23)

Reflecting (6)

Utterances that showed an awareness of the process of reading, interpreting, or discussing were assigned the Reflecting code. These metacognitive utterances often involved reflecting back on the reading experience. Examples of reflecting utterances include the following:

Ms. S: In my mind I kept seeing this picture of a seesaw, and I saw Aunt Earnestine on one end of the seesaw, and I could see Ida Early on the other end of the seesaw. (S1, p. 37)

Steve: We already said that, that was the last discussion. (J7, p. 1)

Tina: It's kind of unusual because, um, at the end [of the story] you would think she was going to hate her baby brother and everything, but she really didn't... (R9, p. 2)

Unknown (7)

Category I utterances that had identifiable content (i.e., Text, Author, Personal, or Process) but not enough to determine kind of meaning construction were coded Unknown for Category II. Typically this code was assigned to utterances that were interrupted and not immediately completed. For example, "So the twins--" (Ms. S, S1, p. 30),
an interrupted and unfinished utterance referring to story characters, was assigned the Text code for Category I and the Unknown code for Category II. Across the 9 coded discussions, less than 2% of the utterances in Ms. Roberts' group were coded Unknown. Five percent and 6% were coded Unknown in Ms. Scott's and Ms. Jennings' groups, respectively. The researcher chose not to disregard these unfinished utterances because they were indicative of interruptions, overlapping talk, speakers yielding the floor to others, and, in some cases, speaker tentativeness.

**Category III. Function of Utterances**

A Category III code was assigned to all utterances except Read Aloud (R) turns, unintelligible or incomplete utterances that did not have enough identifiable content to code (i.e., some utterances coded Other for Category I), and utterances made by the researcher. The purpose of the Category III codes was to broadly determine function patterns in student and teacher utterances. In particular, the researcher believed that identifying utterance functions would provide information about teacher discussion strategies, such as the use of questions. The three function codes are as follows: statement (s), question (q), and tag or rhetorical question (t). Tag and rhetorical questions were utterances made with a questioning tone that suggested only one possible answer or that were not meant to be answered at all. The following are examples of tag and rhetorical questions:

Ms. S: Okay, the water wouldn't hurt you, would it? (S4, p. 48)

Ms. S: Okay, Mike, would you read on please, on page 6? (S1, p. 22)
Summary

A category system was developed to characterize the discussions observed for this study. Three of each group's discussions (the first, middle, and last) were coded using the category system. Category I identified the content of the participants' utterances. Category II classified the kind of meaning construction evidenced by group members when their talk was about the text, the author, personal responses or knowledge, or the discussion process. Finally, Category III broadly determined the function of participants' utterances. Tables 6, 7, and 8 present summaries of the category system.
Table 6

**Category I -- Content of Utterances**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Content of Utterances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text</strong></td>
<td>story elements, literary devices, vocabulary; reference to specific pages; book-related assignments for discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Author</strong></td>
<td>style, choices, background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal</strong></td>
<td>personal opinion or response, personal experience, prior knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process</strong></td>
<td>process of reading, interpreting, discussing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conversation</strong></td>
<td>agreements, acknowledgments, disagreements, evaluations; restatements; negotiations; elaboration, clarification; procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assignments</strong></td>
<td>book-related assignments, projects, activities to be done outside the discussion group context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presence</strong></td>
<td>reference to the researcher; comments by the researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom</strong></td>
<td>reference to other students in the room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td>unidentifiable content; content obviously unrelated to the discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Read Aloud</strong></td>
<td>group read aloud (with turn-taking) of a chapter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Meaning Construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Describing</strong></td>
<td>literal aspects of text or personal experience/prior knowledge; descriptions of book-related discussion assignments or of discussion-related processes or procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inferring</strong></td>
<td>interpretation of text or another speaker's comment; predictions, conclusions, comparisons within the story; problem-solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generalizing</strong></td>
<td>discussion of people in general; contemplation of human nature or the human condition; theme; comparison or contrast of textual elements with personal experience/prior knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluating</strong></td>
<td>assessment of quality of book or experience; value judgments about characters, authors, comments of others; analysis of author's style or choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perspective-Taking</strong></td>
<td>consideration of character's or author's point of view; placing self in character's position; slipping into character's voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflecting</strong></td>
<td>awareness of process of reading, interpreting, discussing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unknown</strong></td>
<td>identifiable content but indeterminable meaning construction -- usually unfinished utterances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8

**Category III -- Function of Utterances**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Statement</strong></td>
<td>Ashley: &quot;Whenever my little sister was born, um, I remember seeing a cigar and it said 'It's a Girl'.&quot; (R9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anne: &quot;But, I think he [Mr. Burton] was also being kind of cruel to the animals because he'd leave them in the trap for three of four days--&quot; (J4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question</strong></td>
<td>Ms. Jennings: [referring to book cover] &quot;So why do you think we might not be able to see the house?&quot; (J1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eric: &quot;Well, why do they call it a country club?&quot; (S4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tag or Rhetorical Question</strong></td>
<td>Ms. Scott: &quot;She [Ida] doesn't care about her appearance does she?&quot; (S1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ms. Roberts: &quot;And I want you to make a love-hate list, and then we're gonna share them and see if we all come up--, and I'll make one too, okay?&quot; (R1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Discussions: Patterns in Teacher Strategies and Student Talk

**Introduction**

This section addresses all three parts of the first research question of the study. Specifically, through an analysis of the content and quantity of teacher talk and student talk within the discussion groups, the researcher addressed the following questions for each teacher:

(a) What are the discussion strategies used by the teacher during literature discussion group sessions with students?

(b) What are the patterns of student talk during small group discussions of literature with their teacher?

(c) How are the teacher's discussion strategies related to the nature of the students' talk within the group?

In the reporting of numerical data for each group's three coded discussions, percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number and represent an average for the three coded discussions. When utterances of a given code were separated into the percentage made by the teacher and the percentage made by the students, the teacher and student totals equaled 100% (+/- 1%). All student and teacher utterances that were assigned a Category III code (i.e., statement, question, and tag/rhetorical question) were included in the quantitative analysis (i.e., counting of codes and calculating of percentages). Table 27 in Appendix F contains summary data on teacher and student utterances in the three coded discussions for each group.

Table 9 presents summary information on the three teachers' groups. Following Table 9, patterns in teacher and student talk in the observed group sessions are discussed.
Table 9

**Focal Literature Discussion Groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ms. Roberts</th>
<th>Ms. Scott</th>
<th>Ms. Jennings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of students</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book</td>
<td>Anastasia Krupnik</td>
<td>Ida Early Comes Over the Mountain</td>
<td>Incident at Hawk's Hill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of discussions</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. length of each session</td>
<td>45 mins.</td>
<td>30 mins.</td>
<td>35 mins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time span of discussions</td>
<td>5 weeks</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)In Discussions 1-3 there were 4 boys and 2 girls. In Discussion 4 there were 4 boys and 3 girls. In Discussions 5-7 there were 3 boys and 3 girls.
Ms. Roberts' Group -- Anastasia Krupnik

Overview

Several patterns in teacher and student talk emerged from the researcher's analysis of the Anastasia Krupnik group discussions. These patterns appeared across the 9 discussions and were highlighted by the in-depth analysis of Discussions 1, 5, and 9.

The participants' talk about the text focused largely on the main character, Anastasia Krupnik. Group members described what Anastasia had done and what had happened to her in the most recent chapters read. They talked about her ever-changing "Things I Love/Things I Hate" list, which appeared at the end of each chapter. They made inferences about Anastasia, interpreting her actions, motivations, and personality. They made generalizations about human nature which stemmed from their talk about events in Anastasia's life, her behavior, or her disposition. They discussed whether or not they would want Anastasia for a friend, what they would do if they were Anastasia, what suggestions they might give her to help her get along better with others, and her character change over time.

Additionally, participants often made connections between the book and their lives. In particular, the students and Ms. Roberts shared personal experiences related to the story, and they revealed aspects of their prior knowledge that helped them to understand, interpret, and generalize from the text.

During several of the discussions the children and Ms. Roberts also spent time brainstorming ideas for book-related projects to do once they
finished reading *Anastasia Krupnik*. For example, in Discussion 5 the students talked about doing a play about the book, making a poster to advertise the book, and writing a sequel to the book. In addition, participants discussed assignments done for the group sessions. For example, in Discussion 2 the children (and Ms. Roberts) shared lists they had written that were like Anastasia's "Things I Love/Things I Hate" list. Similarly, Ms. Roberts asked the students in Discussion 3 to write down words that were difficult for them to comprehend; in the next session participants discussed those words. Group members talked about the meaning of words within the story's context in several of the discussions.

Finally, group read alouds of the text occurred in 6 of the 9 discussion meetings, including Discussions 1 and 5. During much of the first group session the students read aloud Chapter 1 of *Anastasia Krupnik*. Although the read alouds did not represent discussion turns, they were a substantial part of the literature study meetings. Ms. Roberts explained to the researcher that the read alouds gave her an opportunity to check the students' fluency and word recognition abilities. Typically group members would discuss the chapter they had been assigned to read, and then Ms. Roberts would ask the children to take turns reading aloud the next chapter. Depending on time constraints, the group would proceed to discuss the chapter they had just orally read, or they would disband. A total of 23 read aloud turns, all taken by students, occurred in Discussions 1 and 5.

In the three coded discussions, 46% of the total utterances were made by Ms. Roberts and 54% were made by the students. Thus, each of
the 5 students averaged about 11% of the total utterances, although in reality some of the children talked more than others. Ms. Roberts averaged 1.7 utterances per turn, and the students averaged 1.2 utterances per turn. The discussion patterns in Ms. Roberts' group are described in more detail in the following sections.

Teacher Discussion Strategies

Ms. Roberts made 46% of the total coded discussion utterances; however, a closer look at the content of her talk revealed that many of her utterances were comprised solely of conversation maintenance signals such as speaker nominations (often in response to a student's raised hand) and brief acknowledgments of previous remarks (e.g., "okay"). Specifically, 42% of Ms. Roberts' remarks were conversation maintenance signals not coded for Category II, Kind of Meaning Construction. Furthermore, of the total discussion utterances assigned the Conversation Maintenance code (i.e., utterances coded E alone and utterances assigned the E code plus other content codes), 66% were made by the teacher and 34% were made by the students. In addition, Ms. Roberts made 26 of the 28 marked episode changes in the three coded discussions (2 were made by students).

The children as well as the teacher constructed the context in which Ms. Roberts did the bulk of the conversation maintenance work (Mehan, 1982). Throughout the discussions the students frequently raised their hands to get a turn to speak or to answer a question posed by the teacher. Ms. Roberts did not explicitly tell the children to raise their hands in any of the nine discussions. She did, however, often
respond to a student's raised hand by nominating that student to speak. In answer to a raised hand Ms. Roberts also used nonverbal signals, such as a head nod or a hand motion, to give a student the floor.

The following passage from the beginning of the last discussion contains several examples of Ms. Roberts' use of conversation maintenance signals (in bold type).

Tina: At the end it's [the story] really different then you think [sic] it was going to be.

------------- Episode 2

Ms. R: Okay.--

Student: [inaudible]--

Ms. R: [continuing] We finished Anastasia the other day; we should have. And, Tina, what did you say about?

Tina: It's kind of unusual because, um, at the end you would think she [Anastasia] was going to hate her baby brother and everything, but she really didn't, she really [inaudible], and she looked at him, and her dad said, before they went to the hospital he picked her up, and they got some candy cigarettes or something, whatever they are,

Ms. R: cigars.

....

Ms. R: Okay. Kelly?

Kelly: When she left the hospital she had a piece of paper and she wrote 'Someone Special, Sam', and I think I know why she named him Sam, because of her grandpa.

Student: [inaudible]

Kelly: Her grandpa.

Ms. R: Okay.

Michelle: She um, she kept going 'hi Sam', and her mom would go 'hi Sam', her dad would go 'hi Sam.' They all go 'hi Sam, hi Sam, hi Sam.'

Ms. R: Okay. Um, Ashley, what'd you think about?
Ashley: I think it was um, kinda sad at the end because like in the beginning, Anastasia, when she hears like there's gonna be a baby and stuff she doesn't like them [her parents], and she thinks she's [her mom] gonna go in the Guiness Book of World Records and stuff and at the end she, she really likes the baby.

Ms. R: Stacy. What'd you think?

Stacy: I think that--, I don't know. For some reason I think it would be pretty if it was in a movie or something like that.

Tina: Yeah, it would. It'd be sad but it would be good.

Kelly: It'd be better if we hadn't read it.

Ms. R: You think it'd be really a good movie--

Tina: Yeah but sometimes movie people change it and I don't want them to change it around in different ways.

Kelly: Yeah like, maybe um--

Tina: Like in Charlotte's Web, they changed it kinda around a little bit.

Ms. R: Yeah, they do a lot of times.

Tina: Like Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.--

Stacy: and the Chocolate Factory.--

Kelly: Maybe, maybe we could um, do the play [of Anastasia Krupnik] for each other.

[several student turns followed on the topic of a play]... . .

Ms. R: Alright. Michelle?

.......

Michelle: I thought that Anastasia was gonna think her brother was like so--, he was gonna have more attention, or gets in her stuff. And, and like Tina said about the movie, more people would want to watch movies than read a book. There's a lot more people like movies than books.

Ms. R: Okay.--

Michelle: [continuing] So I think that'd be a good way to get people to, instead of reading it, watch it.

.......

Episode 3

Ms. R: Okay. She [Anastasia] did a lot of changing with her list. She took Mrs. Westvessel off the hate list. Why? Stacy? (R9, pp. 1-6)

In the above excerpt, Ms. Roberts began the second episode by following up on a student comment. Subsequently, she invited the other children to share their thoughts on the story, primarily designating speakers and acknowledging remarks. After the students had had several turns in which they discussed the end of the book, the book's potential as a movie, and the possibility of doing a play about the story, Ms. Roberts moved the discussion along by asking a question about Anastasia's list.

Ms. Roberts often began the discussions with a describing or inferring question about the most recent chapter the students had read; she sometimes asked similar questions at the beginning of new episodes as well. It was not uncommon for more than one student to answer a teacher question, then for the children and/or the teacher to make related statements which propelled the discussion forward. At times Ms. Roberts also asked students follow-up questions on comments they made, as she did in the above excerpt from Discussion 9. Overall, Ms. Roberts sprinkled rather than bombarded the literature discussions with substantive content questions (i.e., questions coded for Category II, Kind of Meaning Construction). In the three coded discussions, only 6% of Ms. Roberts' total utterances were questions assigned a meaning construction code. Almost all of those questions called for describing or inferring responses.
Rather than asking many questions, a common strategy for Ms. Roberts was making substantive content statements (i.e., those coded for Category II, Kind of Meaning Construction). In these statements she typically shared personal knowledge or experiences related to the story, interpreted the text, and/or positively evaluated, summarized, elaborated on, or justified assertions made by the students. Ms. Roberts often made statements that followed up on or added to the content of the children's utterances.

Ms. Roberts thus alternated between two key strategies during the discussions: (a) nominating speakers and acknowledging student remarks, and (b) contributing substantive content talk, usually in the form of statements. The following excerpt from Discussion 5 illustrates Ms. Roberts' use of statements beyond simple conversation maintenance signals. Preceding the excerpt the participants had been discussing why they thought Anastasia would be both scared and sad as she thought about the nursing home and her grandmother.

Ms. R: How many of you have ever been to a nursing home?
Stacy: Um, I don't know.
Michelle: My daddy preaches [inaudible]--
Kelly: I don't know if I have or not.
Ms. R: Okay.
Michelle: They're just sitting there all the time.
Ms. R: Alright, I think what you said, everybody in general, is really true. And this is probably why Anastasia felt sort of scared and sad is, that if you've never been in a nursing home, it is sort of sad when you go in to look at all of these older people sitting around and sometimes they're just so ill that they're just sitting there maybe half asleep or--, and they're very, very lonely. They'll sit out in the hall with a bunch of other people just to visit or to see
someone else. . . . And so it is sort of sad that there they've been, and you know, this is almost what we would say their end of their lives because they're so much older and there's no one there to visit with them--

Kelly: It's kind of like a prison a little bit, locked up.--

Ms. R: Yeah, a lot of people, a lot of older people consider that. That's a very good similarity, because a lot of older people consider, 'if I have to go to the nursing home, that's just like putting me in a prison.'

Kelly: 'Cause you can't, well some people can go outside and stand, but that's all they can do, besides going to the bathroom--

Ms. R: Right. And some people, it's sort of sad, but some of the older people you actually see, because of the type-, maybe they have like Alzheimer['s], and they're losing their memory or their capacities, or maybe they're afraid they'll fall.--

Tina: Maybe that's what her [Anastasia's] grandmother has.--

Ms. R: [continuing] they will strap them into the chair, like if they're in a wheelchair . . .

. . . .

Ms. R: Michelle?

Michelle: Um, one time we were---, see my dad he worked it out that we could sing at the rest home Christmas carols, and one time there was this lady, she was a [sic] old timer, she grabbed my dad's Bible and tried to keep it. And then one time we were just going there, and . . . she didn't know, she thought I was her granddaughter or something, grabbed me and wouldn't let me go.

. . . .

Ms. R: Ashley?

Ashley: Um, [inaudible] don't remember stuff very well, I think that's Anastasia's grandmother, she might have that [Alzheimer's], because she doesn't remember her name.

Ms. R: Right. That's sort of a lead in clues [sic] to tell us that Anastasia's grandma probably does have like the beginning stages of Alzheimer's maybe. Stacy? (R5, pp. 6-11)

The preceding transcript excerpt contains many utterances that exemplify Ms. Roberts' strategy of making substantive content
statements. She drew upon her personal knowledge to tell the students about nursing home residents, and she positively evaluated, elaborated on, and/or justified student comments. For example, when Kelly stated that a nursing home was "kind of like a prison," Ms. Roberts responded with a positive evaluation and a further justification for Kelly's assertion. Similarly, Ms. Roberts positively evaluated and elaborated on Ashley's comment about Anastasia's grandmother perhaps having Alzheimer's.

As previously noted, many of Ms. Roberts' substantive content remarks contained reference to prior knowledge or personal experiences. The Personal code was assigned to 18% of Ms. Roberts' total utterances. Of her utterances coded for Category II (Meaning Construction), 47% were given the Personal code. Some of these utterances were statements referring to Ms. Roberts' own prior knowledge, personal experiences, or personal responses. For example, when the participants discussed list-making after looking at Anastasia's "Things I Love/Things I Hate" list, Ms. Roberts told the children, "Oh, I have to have a shopping list when I go to the grocery store" (R1, p. 5).

Additionally, some of Ms. Roberts' personal utterances were questions or statements which encouraged students to make connections between the story and their prior knowledge or experiences, including school experiences. In the Discussion 5 excerpt above she asked the children, "How many of you have ever been to a nursing home?" Similarly, during the same discussion she explained the meaning of "hieroglyphics" (from Chapter 5) as follows: "Ah, hieroglyphics is an early form of writing, like if you've every watched the
um, 'Indiana Jones' movies where they go in the tombs and there's [sic] all these writings and pictures on the wall, that's hieroglyphics" (R5, p. 3). In Discussion 5 Ms. Roberts also brought up the student council ballots used in the children's own school when the group was discussing Anastasia's complaint that no one in her class voted for her on secret ballots. Throughout all of the discussions Ms. Roberts sanctioned personal talk.

Overall, Ms. Roberts gave the students ample opportunity to share their thoughts during the literature discussions. She encouraged the children to make the book personally meaningful by modeling and permitting talk which connected prior knowledge and experiences to the story. Ms. Roberts used conversation maintenance signals to acknowledge student remarks and to nominate speakers, often in response to their raised hands. She gave students the floor to talk about book-related projects to do after completing the book as well as to talk about the book itself. She used questions only intermittently; they sparked rather than drove the discussions. Finally, Ms. Roberts used statements to inform with prior knowledge, to interpret the text, and to support the children's assertions about the book. Summarizing, elaborating on, justifying, and/or positively evaluating student comments was a recurrent pattern in Ms. Roberts' talk.

**Patterns in Student Talk**

The students in the *Anastasia Krupnik* group made 54% of the total coded discussion utterances. They often eagerly raised their hands to have a turn to speak when others were talking or when Ms. Roberts
asked a question. They sometimes kept their hands raised when another student, or Ms. Roberts, had the floor. Occasionally the children used a teacher-nominated turn to shift the discussion topic (i.e., to make unmarked topic changes). They frequently looked at Ms. Roberts when they talked, but at times they also gazed at their peers. Although their focus appeared to be more often on the teacher than on each other, they clearly listened to the comments of their fellow students, as evidenced by the topical threads that wove their remarks, and those of their teacher, together. The patterns in student talk for the group are described in more detail below.

**Category 1. Content.** Student utterances in the three coded discussions were most often assigned the Text, Personal, Conversation Maintenance, and Assignments or Projects content codes. Table 10 presents the percentage of total student discussion utterances in each of the content codes.
Table 10

Ms. Roberts' Group: Percentage of Total Student Utterances in Each of the Category I/Content Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Code</th>
<th>Student Utterances in Each of the Content Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n^a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text (A)</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author (B)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal (C)</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process (D)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation Maintenance (E)</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments or Projects (FF)</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Presence (FG)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Context (FH)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (I)</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The percentages total more than 100% because many utterances were assigned more than one Category I code.

^aActual number of student utterances assigned each code across the three coded discussions.

^bA total of 700 student utterances were coded for Ms. Roberts' group across the three discussions. This number was used to calculate the percentages.
The children's textual comments revolved primarily around Anastasia and what was happening in her life in the most recent chapter read. They interpreted her behavior and personality, evaluated her actions, and imagined themselves as Anastasia or someone who knew her. The following excerpts from Discussion 5 exemplify the students' focus on the main character. The group had been talking about Anastasia's discontent with her long name.

Tina: I think she just wants to get rid of her name.
Ms. R: I think so too. Kelly?
Kelly: Um, it's like, because of the ballots, they [Anastasia's classmates] don't know how to spell her name, and she thinks that they won't vote for her, and only four people voted for her . . . but maybe some other people think that she wouldn't be good for it.
Ms. R: True. Could be, but she's still not considering that other point of view, she thinks it's all because of her name. Michelle?
Michelle: Yeah, like Kelly said, maybe people think she's a smart-aleck or they don't like her at all.--
Stacy: 'Cause she is [a smart-aleck].
Tina: Yeah, she is!--
Michelle: Yeah, she is. And maybe they don't want to vote for her because she wouldn't be a good person to do it or something like that.-- (R5, pp. 17-18)

. . . .
Tina: I'm Anastasia's age and I um, think she should change her attitude too, because she's really smart-alecky, and she does need a ruler.--
Student: Maybe she--
Tina: [continuing] Like she needs a boss to boss her around instead of her bossing everybody else around.--
Michelle: See how it feels.
Tina: Yeah . . .
Kelly: I would try to help Anastasia by um saying to try to be nicer to people so they can be her friends, and tell her that they don't like to be bossed around, but they like to do what each other likes to do and like to help each other. . . (R5, pp. 26-27)

As well as talking about the text itself, the students, like their teacher, shared personal experiences, prior knowledge, and personal opinions and responses related to the story. Approximately 34% of the children's total utterances were assigned the Personal code. Of their utterances coded for Category II (Meaning Construction), 58% were given the Personal code. For example, in the preceding discussion excerpt Tina stated, "I'm Anastasia's age and I um, think she should change her attitude too, because she's really smart-alecky, and she does need a ruler." In Discussion 9, Ms. Roberts asked the students if they knew why Anastasia's father purchased a box of cigars after the birth of his son. The children shared their prior knowledge of this tradition and some told of their fathers getting cigars when younger siblings were born.

During the discussions the students also made utterances which reflected conversation maintenance. Although Ms. Roberts made the majority of these utterances overall, 30% of the students' remarks were assigned the Conversation Maintenance code. The children's conversation maintenance signals were most often agreements or acknowledgments of previous remarks (e.g., "yeah," "Like Kelly said"). Less frequently they expressed disagreement with fellow students (e.g., "no"). Occasionally students also made distinctive bids to hold the floor (e.g., "I have two things to say").
Finally, students spent a considerable amount of time discussing book-related assignments or projects. In Discussions 5 and 9 in particular, the children suggested many possible projects, mostly group endeavors, to do once they finished the book. During the course of both discussions project talk flowed from talk about the book, then ebbed as participants returned their attention to the story, then resurfaced again during the latter part of the sessions.

Although participants referred to projects in four of the group sessions, Discussions 5 and 9 seemed to contain more of these utterances than did any of the other discussions. In the three coded discussions, 24% of the students' utterances were given the Assignments or Projects code. The percentage seemed to be indicative of the students' desire to extend the book and the group beyond the discussion sessions. When all 9 discussions were taken into account, however, the 24% figure appeared to over represent the amount of project talk done by the students overall. Much of the project talk was not coded Text for Category I, nor was it coded for Category II (Meaning Construction), because it infrequently involved revisiting the meaning of the book itself. For example, a student suggestion to write a book about Anastasia at the beach (Discussion 9) was not assigned the Text code, and it was not assigned a Kind of Meaning Construction code.

Category II, Meaning Construction. Of the total student utterances in the three coded discussions, 33% were assigned the Describing code and 22% involved meaning construction beyond simple description. The researcher coded 58% of the student utterances for Category II; 42% were
not assigned a Category II code. The students' extensive project talk contributed to the large percentage of utterances not coded for Category II. Of the student utterances coded for kind of meaning construction, 57% involved describing, while 38% involved inferring, generalizing, evaluating, perspective-taking, or reflecting. Table 11 presents the percentage of student utterances coded for Category II that were assigned to each of the meaning construction codes.
Table 11

Ms. Roberts' Group: Student Utterances Coded for Category II -- Percentage in Each of the Meaning Construction Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kind of Meaning Construction</th>
<th>Student Utterances Coded for Category II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( n )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing (1)</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferring (2)</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalizing (3)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating (4)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective-Taking (5)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting (6)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown (7)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>406</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Of the 700 total coded student utterances, 406 (58%) were coded for Category II. The 406 figure was used to calculate the percentages.
**Category III. Function.** Most of the students' utterances were statements in function (93%). The remaining 7% were questions. The students asked questions that were coded as conversation maintenance signals, questions about assignments or projects, and occasionally questions about the book. Less than 1% of the children's utterances were tag or rhetorical questions.

**Relationships Between Teacher Strategies and Student Talk**

Several of Ms. Roberts' discussion strategies seemed to be related to the nature of the students' talk in the Anastasia Krupnik group. In particular, her use of conversation maintenance signals to nominate speakers and acknowledge student comments, her emphasis on personal connections to the story, and her contribution of substantive content statements appeared to correlate with certain patterns in student talk during the discussions.

Ms. Roberts' strategy of nominating speakers and acknowledging student comments seemed to reinforce the students' use of hand-raising as a means of getting the floor. Although students did not always raise their hands before speaking, it was common for them to do so. Similarly, with Ms. Roberts often orchestrating turn-taking procedures, overlapping talk was usually short-lived, and interruptions typically resulted in one speaker yielding the floor to the other.

It appeared that being nominated to speak by the teacher and having time to express their thoughts on the book gave Ms. Roberts' students the opportunity to engage in meaning construction that included, but also went beyond, simple description. Similarly, Ms.
Roberts' pattern of giving approval to the children's remarks through positive evaluations and supportive statements seemed to encourage the children to share their literary understandings with the group. Even the two students whom Ms. Roberts considered shy spoke up during the group meetings. Throughout the discussions, whether Ms. Roberts or a child was speaking, other students in the group showed an eagerness to contribute their comments on the topic being discussed. Teacher and student statements generated more statements as responses and ideas were shared and considered by the group. Occasional teacher questions associated with the book also generated student answers and then more related statements.

During the discussions Ms. Roberts encouraged the children to make connections between the story and their previous experiences and knowledge, and she made similar connections herself. Not surprisingly, the students often shared personal narratives related to the text and revealed prior knowledge they brought to the story. Making personal connections appeared to help the children gain insights into the story. For example, when the participants talked about the elderly in nursing homes and Ms. Roberts mentioned Alzheimer's disease in Discussion 5, Tina and later Ashley suggested that perhaps Anastasia's forgetful grandmother had Alzheimer's.

As well as personal talk, talk about possible projects to do upon completion of the book was sanctioned by Ms. Roberts. Project talk, often initiated by the students, was prevalent in Discussions 5 and 9, and much of it was not coded for Category II (Meaning Construction). More
project talk correlated with less talk about the text itself. Indeed, fewer total discussion utterances than might be expected, 39%, were coded for content across Discussions 1, 5, and 9; however, as previously noted, project talk was not present in all of the group discussions. The large amount of project talk in the coded discussions did appear to be indicative of Ms. Roberts' willingness to let the students pursue topics of particular interest to them during the group sessions. It also exhibited the children's desire to engage in other group activities inspired by the book.

In conclusion, Ms. Roberts' strategies during the *Anastasia Krupnik* group discussions appeared to create a context in which the students felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas. In particular, her conversation maintenance techniques and her own contributions of substantive content statements seemed to generate student talk. The children's talk about the story included describing, inferring, and generalizing remarks. In addition, students occasionally evaluated Anastasia's motivations and actions and the book itself. Also, they imagined what they would do if they were Anastasia or if they knew her (i.e., perspective-taking). Finally, Ms. Roberts' strategies encouraged talk about prior knowledge and experiences related to the book, and they permitted extended talk about potential book-related group projects.

**Ms. Scott's Group -- Ida Early Comes Over the Mountain**

**Overview**

A number of patterns in participant talk emerged from the researcher's analysis of the *Ida Early* group discussions. The detailed
analysis of Discussions 1, 4, and 8 highlighted patterns that appeared across all 8 discussions.

Student and teacher talk about the text typically focused on the characters, unfolding events in the story, and the setting. The participants described elements of the story. They made inferences about the motivations, feelings, and actions of Ida Early and members of the Sutton family. They gave their personal opinions of and responses to people and events in the book. They imagined what they would do or feel if they were in a character's position, and they occasionally slipped into a character's voice to give an interpretive rendering of what that character might have said. The participants also made connections between the story and their prior knowledge or experiences. Furthermore, they talked about the "country language" used by the people in the book. Specifically, group members interpreted the characters' mountain expressions and discussed how they would phrase what the characters said. The teacher and students also talked about Ida's good-natured trickery and her habit of telling "tall tales," and they speculated on the truthfulness of Ida's exaggerations.

The participants' talk about the characters' dialect and Ida's trickery and exaggerations was tied to an on-going written assignment given by Ms. Scott. This assignment was to be done as students read the designated chapters for each day's discussion. Specifically, at the end of Discussion 2 Ms. Scott asked the children to jot down page numbers from the book that contained examples of the following: how Ida tricked people, Ida's tall tales, and the characters' country or mountain phrases.
Similar written assignments were given in subsequent discussions. Several of the group meetings began with talk about examples of characters' dialect, trickery, and/or exaggerations found in the reading assignment for the day.

Group members, chiefly Ms. Scott, also briefly mentioned the author in most of the discussions. For example, Robert Burch's writing style and use of foreshadowing in the story were noted. In the last discussion the participants talked about the author's background, which was provided on an "About the Author" page at the end of the book. The author was not a focus of any of the discussions; rather, his background and style were sporadically acknowledged.

In the three coded discussions, 35% of the total utterances were made by Ms. Scott and 65% were made by the children. There were 6 students in the discussion group; one student was not present for Discussion 8. Across the three coded discussions each student averaged about 12% of the total utterances; of course, some children actually took more turns than others. Ms. Scott averaged 1.6 utterances per turn, and the students averaged 1.1 utterances per turn. The discussion patterns in Ms. Scott's group are described in more detail in the next sections.

**Teacher Discussion Strategies**

Ms. Scott made 35% of the total coded discussion utterances. Approximately 33% of her utterances were assigned only the Conversation Maintenance code. These utterances were not coded for Category II (Kind of Meaning Construction). Ms. Scott's conversation maintenance-only utterances were typically acknowledgments,
restatements, and procedural comments. In particular, she seemed to use "okay" quite often to move the discussions along as well as to mark the introduction of a new topic. Additionally, 6% of Ms. Scott's utterances were tag or rhetorical questions, another form of conversation maintenance. Of the total discussion utterances assigned the Conversation Maintenance code (i.e., utterances coded E only and utterances given the E code along with other content codes), 45% were made by Ms. Scott and 55% were made by the students. Thus, the teacher and students shared conversation maintenance responsibilities.

Although the children played a large role in maintaining the conversations, Ms. Scott made all 53 marked episode changes across the three coded discussions. At times she did follow up on the children's comments and pursue avenues of thought they initiated; however, she generally guided the group members through a sequential discussion of the assigned chapters read for the day. In the first discussion Ms. Scott asked the students to read aloud the first chapter together. She interjected questions and comments about the story between read aloud turns. A total of 12 read aloud turns (11 by students and 1 by the teacher) occurred in the first discussion. There were no group read alouds during subsequent discussions.

Ms. Scott focused the group on the chapters read for each discussion session primarily by referring the students to particular page numbers in the text and by asking questions. During the discussions Ms. Scott often named a particular page, read an excerpt from that page, then asked a question. Answers by students, along with additional
student and teacher comments related to the topic of the question, typically followed. Additionally, when the children shared examples of the characters’ dialect and Ida’s tall tales and trickery, Ms. Scott encouraged them to give the page numbers the examples were on so that she and other group members could look for themselves.

In the three coded discussions, 22% of Ms. Scott’s total utterances were questions coded for Category II (Meaning Construction). Ms. Scott pre-planned many of the questions she asked during the discussions. She had read *Ida Early* prior to the study, but she read it again along with the students. As she reread the story, she wrote brief questions in the margins of each chapter of her copy of the book. Many of these questions surfaced in the discussions.

Most of Ms. Scott’s questions called for describing or inferring responses. Table 12 presents the percentage of teacher questions coded for Category II in each of the meaning construction codes.
Table 12

Ms. Scott's Questions Coded for Category II: Percentage in Each of the Meaning Construction Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kind of Meaning Construction</th>
<th>Questions Coded for Category II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing (1)</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferring (2)</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalizing (3)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating (4)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective-Taking (5)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting (6)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown (7)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>173</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Ms. Scott made a total of 775 utterances across the three coded discussions. Of those utterances, 173 (22%) were questions coded for Category II. Percentages in the table were calculated based on the 173 figure.
The following discussion excerpt illustrates Ms. Scott's strategy of referring the children to specific page numbers and asking questions.

Ms. S: Let's look on page 44.
Mary: 44.
Eric: We didn't read page--, oh yeah we did.
Ms. S: That's the first part of 'Close Call.' Okay, at the bottom of the page, Ida says, 'Ladies and gentlemen, from the prone position.' What did she mean when she said 'from the prone position'?--
Eric: Laying down. Laying down.
Student: Oh, almost--
Mary: Sitting down.--
Student: She was laying down and she threw the magazine all the way across the room onto the rack.
Mary: Yeah.--
Ms. S: She's a pretty good shot, don't you think?
Student: Yeah.--
Eric: Oh, I read that [inaudible]--
Ms. S: [continuing] Isn't that about the third or fourth thing she's thrown?--

....
Rick: Yeah she's [Ida] the Annie Oakley of the housewives.
Ms. S: Good comparison. Pretty good shot. Okay. Um, how did Archie react--, Archie's J. C.'s little brother, how did he react to Ida at first?-- (S4, pp. 21-23)

In conjunction with asking describing and inferring questions about the text, Ms. Scott regularly asked the students questions about their personal opinions, personal responses, or prior knowledge. For example, in the first discussion she posed this question: "Does anyone know anything at all about the Depression, what it means?" In Discussion 4 she asked the children, "What do you think Earnestine is
thinking about Ida right now?" In Discussion 8 she asked, "Were you surprised when they said she [Ida] was at the airfield selling hot dogs and burgers?"

Ms. Scott also shared her own interpretations of and personal responses to the story during the group sessions. Furthermore, she sprinkled the discussions with reflective comments that revealed her own processes of reading and interpreting. The following statements from Discussions 1, 4, and 8 exemplify Ms. Scott's modeling of her own interpretive processes and responses:

Ms. S: And that's just what it [the book's title] reminded me of are those two different songs about the mountain [e.g., 'She'll be Comin' 'Round the Mountain When She Comes']. (S1, p. 4)

Ms. S: These two chapters were kind of, as I read them, and as I thought about them, they were very different. One was, I felt a lot more serious, and was almost kind of frightening. And the second chapter was a lot funnier and a lot lighter. It made me giggle. (S4, p. 17)

Ms. S: I wondered when I saw that in italics [i.e., a phrase in a letter that Randall and Ellen wrote to Ida], I knew there was something special about it, and I remembered that Randall and Ellen had signed it. (S8, p. 3)

Overall, 26% of Ms. Scott's utterances were assigned the Personal code for Category I (Content). Of her utterances coded for Category II (Meaning Construction), 41% were given the Personal code. Many of these utterances were questions or statements that referred to personal opinions/responses or prior knowledge; some were also connections between the story and personal experiences.

During the discussions Ms. Scott also urged students to note patterns in the story. In particular, she encouraged an awareness of how
previous story events were related to the current story events being discussed. The following discussion segment illustrates Ms. Scott's strategy of prompting the children to note story patterns:

Ms. S: Um, if you were to continue with that paragraph, it said, [reading from page 52] 'the twins had not been able to understand how anything called a country club could be in the city.'

Mary: Yeah.

Student: Yeah.

Ms. S: Did that remind you of something you had read about earlier in the story? (S4, pp. 33-34)

In summary, during the group meetings Ms. Scott guided students through a discussion of the chapters read for each session. She referred the children to specific pages to ask questions or make comments. Ms. Scott's questions appeared to monitor the students' comprehension of the story as well as to invite their personal responses. She encouraged students to note patterns in the text, building meaning as story events unfolded. During the group meetings Ms. Scott also shared her own responses to *Ida Early*.

**Patterns in Student Talk**

The students in Ms. Scott's group made 65% of the total coded discussion utterances. They occasionally raised their hands during the group discussions; however, hand-raising was not a prevalent practice. Rather, the children simply spoke up, or Ms. Scott nominated them to speak. Patterns in student talk in the three discussion categories are discussed below.

**Category I, Content.** In the three coded discussions, the majority of student utterances (63%) contained reference to the text. Many
student utterances were also assigned the Personal and Conversation Maintenance content codes. Table 13 presents the percentage of total student discussion utterances in each of the content codes.
Table 13

Ms. Scott's Group: Percentage of Total Student Utterances in Each of the Category I/Content Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Code</th>
<th>Student Utterances in Each of the Content Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( n^a )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text (A)</td>
<td>920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author (B)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal (C)</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process (D)</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation Maintenance (E)</td>
<td>537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments or Projects (FF)</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Presence (FG)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Context (FH)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (I)</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The percentages total more than 100% because many utterances were assigned more than one Category I code.

\(^a\)Actual number of student utterances assigned each code across the three coded discussions.

\(^b\)A total of 1451 student utterances were coded for Ms. Scott's group across the three discussions. This number was used to calculate the percentages.
The students' talk about the text included reference to the following: the characters' motivations, actions, feelings, dialect, and attributes (e.g., appearance); story events; and book cover illustrations (Ms. Scott's edition of the book had a different cover than the students' edition). Virtually all of the students' utterances given the Assignments or Projects code were also assigned the Text code, because they referred to book-related assignments done for the discussions.

In addition to discussing the text itself, the students shared their personal opinions/responses and prior knowledge related to the story. Occasionally they talked about personal experiences too. Overall, 25% of the students' utterances were assigned the Personal code. The following excerpt from the last discussion contains examples of personal as well as text-related utterances made by the students.

Trisha: I knew that when she [Ida] came around that it was gonna be Ida.
Mike: Yeah,
Mary: And the motorcycle--
Mike: [continuing] I know, when the motorcycle came around.--
Trisha: It was obvious.--
Mary: Yeah. It couldn't be anybody else.--
Mike: I liked the part--
Mary: [continuing] Nobody else really knows about friends, and they don't ride motorcycles [inaudible].--
Ms. S: Don't you love the way they described her?
Mike: Yeah.--
Mary: Oh, yeah.--
Mike: I liked the part when she [Ida] said she was walking on the plane's wings from side to side.--
Ms. S: Yeah.--
Eric: Yeah.
Mary: Oh.
Ms. S: What did that remind you of?--
Eric: A lie.
Ms. S: One of her big lies,--
Student: Yeah.--
Ms. S: [continuing] one of her tall tales-- (S8, pp. 1-2)

Finally, along with sharing their understandings and interpretations of the story, students showed agreement and sometimes disagreement (e.g., "no," "but"), with other group participants' comments. Additionally, they often acknowledged the remarks of others. In all, 37% of the students' utterances were coded for conversation maintenance. In the previous excerpt from Discussion 8, the students uttered several agreement or acknowledgment signals (e.g., "I know," "yeah," "oh"). The children also made conversation maintenance comments in the form negotiations of meaning (e.g., "Well, . . .") and restatements of their own remarks in subsequent turns. Same-speaker restatements most often occurred after a speaker was overlapped, interrupted, or not acknowledged by other speakers. The following segment from the first discussion illustrates the students' use of conversation maintenance signals (in bold type). The participants were discussing Ida Early's height.
Ms. S: [referring to p. 7 of the book] Okay, what does she [Ida] mean by that, 'I'm as near six feet as I am seven'?

Eric: She's close,

Trisha: She's in between, so like six foot five [inches]--

Eric: No, because,--

Ms. S: Okay.--

Eric: [continuing] well yeah, but she's near six feet, oh yeah, because she's close.--

Mike: Yeah, she's like--

Trisha: Yeah, six foot five [inches]--

Eric: [continuing] She's six [feet] six [inches], that means she's six [feet] six [inches]--

Ms. S: Okay.--

Trisha: Six [feet] six [inches], yeah--

Eric: [continuing] because six [feet] six [inches] is in the middle of seven and six.

Ms. S: Okay, so Trisha was right, it meant that she was about half way. What do you think about Dewey's comment where he said, 'You're tall, I'll bet you're taller than anybody' [p. 7]? (S1, p. 32)

In the preceding excerpt, the students demonstrated that they were considering the comments of their peers as they clarified their understanding of Ida's self-description of her height.

**Category II, Meaning Construction.** In the three coded discussions, 31% of all student utterances were assigned the Describing code; 31% involved meaning construction beyond simple description. The researcher coded 69% of the students' utterances for Category II; 31% were not assigned a Category II code. The majority of student utterances not coded for kind of meaning construction were conversation maintenance signals. Of the student utterances coded for Category II, 45% involved describing, and 45% involved inferring, generalizing,
evaluating, or perspective-taking. The 10% of student utterances coded Unknown is largely indicative of the degree of interruptions and overlapping talk in the discussions. Table 14 presents the percentage of student utterances coded for Category II that were assigned to each of the meaning construction codes.
Table 14

Ms. Scott's Group: Student Utterances Coded for Category II --

Percentage in Each of the Meaning Construction Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kind of Meaning Construction</th>
<th>Student Utterances Coded for Category II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing (1)</td>
<td>447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferring (2)</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalizing (3)</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating (4)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective-Taking (5)</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown (7)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>994</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Of the 1451 total coded student utterances, 994 (69%) were coded for Category II. The 994 figure was used to calculate the percentages.
**Category III. Function.** Most of the students' utterances, 94%, were statements. The remaining utterances, 6%, were questions. Student questions included reference to the story, cover illustrations, conversation maintenance, and assignments. The students did not ask any tag or rhetorical questions in the three coded discussions.

**Relationships Between Teacher Strategies and Student Talk**

Several of Ms. Scott's discussion strategies appeared to be related to the nature of the students' talk in the Ida Early group. In particular, Ms. Scott's strategies of asking questions about the story and referring students to page numbers in the book appeared to be correlated with the students' close focus on the most recent chapters read for each discussion. During the sessions the children described and interpreted the characters' motivations, actions, feelings, and dialect. They considered a character's point of view or imagined what they would do or feel in a character's situation. They made generalizations which stemmed from talk about people or events in the book. In addition, they sometimes evaluated characters or story events.

Although Ms. Scott guided the group sessions in terms of topical content, she clearly gave students the opportunity to share and explore their thoughts on each part of the story before moving the discussions along. The quantity of student talk (65% of the total discussion utterances) compared to the quantity of teacher talk (35% of the total discussion utterances) indicates that Ms. Scott did not dominate the discussions. Furthermore, the students as well as Ms. Scott sustained the discussions with the use of conversation maintenance signals.
As well as focusing the students on the assigned readings for each discussion, Ms. Scott also encouraged personal talk. Specifically, she modeled and invited personal responses to and opinions of the story. Furthermore, she sanctioned talk that related prior knowledge to the story. In addition, Ms. Scott occasionally shared a personal experience related to the text or asked students to do the same. The students' utterances assigned the Personal code were similar in content to Ms. Scott's personal utterances. That is, students often expressed personal responses and opinions and shared prior knowledge, and they occasionally made connections between personal experiences and the story.

Ms. Scott's strategy of sporadically reflecting on her own processes of reading and interpreting did not seem to influence the students to do the same. While 5% of Ms. Scott's utterances coded for Category II were assigned the Reflecting code, less than 1% of students' Category II utterances involved reflecting.

In conclusion, the children had the opportunity to express their literary understandings of the story within the discussion framework maintained by Ms. Scott. They engaged in meaning construction that often went beyond simple description. In fact, about as many of their utterances were coded for inferring, generalizing, evaluating, and perspective-taking combined as were coded for describing in Category II. Finally, the students' use of conversation maintenance signals during the discussions revealed their engagement with fellow group members.
Ms. Jennings' Group -- Incident at Hawk's Hill

Overview

The analysis of the Incident at Hawk's Hill group discussions revealed several patterns in teacher and student talk. These patterns appeared across all 7 discussions and were highlighted by the detailed analysis of Discussions 1, 4, and 7.

The participants' talk about the book focused on the characters and unfolding story events. The students described episodes from the most recent chapters they had read, often with fastidious attention to detail. They made inferences about characters' motivations, actions, and feelings, and they made predictions about future story events. Students and Ms. Jennings made generalizations about human or animal nature that stemmed from talk about specific aspects of the story, and they evaluated the characters' personalities and choices. They also occasionally evaluated the author's style and choices. Finally, participants sporadically discussed the meaning of challenging vocabulary words within the story's context.

During the discussions the students and the teacher revealed prior knowledge related to the story or to the discussions themselves. For instance, in the first discussion Ms. Jennings asked the children if they had participated in in-depth groups in the past. Throughout the group sessions the students also shared their personal opinions of and responses to the story. In addition, they occasionally considered a character's point of view or discussed what they would do in a character's position.
Participants talked about discussion processes and procedures as well, especially in Discussion 1. Specifically, in the first discussion Ms. Jennings asked the students to decide how many pages of the book to read for each session. In subsequent discussions she reminded the children to specify how much of the story they were going to read for upcoming sessions. In Discussion 1 Ms. Jennings also asked students to establish "rules" that would enable group members to participate fully in the discussions. Additionally, in the first session Ms. Jennings explained the nature of in-depth reading and in-depth discussions. For instance, she informed the children that there would be arguments in the discussions and that they would need to be able to go back to the book to prove their points.

In the three coded discussions, 26% of the total utterances were made by Ms. Jennings and 74% were made by the students. There were 6 students in most of the group sessions; however, the group membership changed slightly over the course of the discussions. In the fourth discussion a third girl joined the group; thus 7 students (3 girls and 4 boys) were present for Discussion 4. Beginning with the fifth discussion, one boy dropped out of the group, leaving 3 girls and 3 boys for the last three discussions. Across the three coded discussions, each student averaged approximately 12% of the total utterances, although in reality some of the children talked considerably more than others. Ms. Jennings averaged 1.6 utterances per turn, and the students averaged 1.1 utterances per turn. The discussion patterns in Ms. Jennings' group are described in more detail in the following sections.
Teacher Discussion Strategies

Ms. Jennings made 26% of the total coded discussion utterances. In addition, she made 36 of the 40 marked episode changes in the three coded discussions; 4 changes were made by students. Approximately 31% of Ms. Jennings' utterances were assigned only the Conversation Maintenance code. These utterances were not coded for Category II. Many of Ms. Jennings' conversation maintenance-only utterances were acknowledgments and procedural comments. Of the total discussion utterances assigned the Conversation Maintenance code (i.e., utterances coded E only and utterances given the E code along with other content codes), 35% were made by Ms. Jennings and 65% were made by the students. Thus, the students played a large role in maintaining the discussions.

Ms. Jennings laid the groundwork in the first group meeting for the students to take much of the responsibility for running the discussions. She prompted the children to suggest rules for the discussions. For example, she asked, "What kind of rule do you want to establish if somebody hasn't read the material, or finished it?" (J1, p. 51). In addition, she told students to decide for themselves how many pages of the book to read before each discussion. At the beginning of the first session a student asked the researcher if group members could choose their own pseudonyms. The researcher responded yes. Ms. Jennings then invited the students to introduce themselves and explained that the researcher would use their pseudonyms when writing up the study.
As well as explicitly discussing group procedures with students, Ms. Jennings explained the nature of in-depth groups and in-depth reading during the first session. Some of her explanations emerged as students made statements or asked questions about rules for the group. For instance, when a student asked if it was permissible to read ahead of the pages assigned for each discussion, Ms. Jennings stated that she never told people that they could not do so. She went on to explain what students should do if they read ahead, and she shared her expectations for student talk in the group, as shown in the following excerpts from Discussion 1:

Ms. J: But what you need to do is, if you're going to do that [read ahead], you make a mental note, that after this, after what I'm reading from this point on, I can't talk about yet, because others won't have read that. And then you'll have to reread that part so that you'll know, because this is in-depth, and that means that you talk about it, and there are going to be arguments, you know why?

Student: Because it's a hard book to read.

Anne: 'Cause some people may interpret the writing different ways than other people.

Ms. J: In some ways we all probably are going to interpret it differently, and so one of the things you need to be able to do is to go back to the book to prove it when you get into it.-- (Jl, p. 45)

......

Ms. J: Alright, any other things that you think would have to be done in order for you to discuss the book every day?

Diane: Well, if you think that like they're [other group members] wrong, and they just must have like read something wrong or something, then maybe you should, if you want, I was wondering if we were allowed to correct them?

Ms. J: Well you can say 'I don't agree,' and then other people might not agree, or they might agree, and then how do you prove it?

Anne: You go back to the book.--
Tony: Go back and read it.-- (J1, pp. 48-49)

....

Ms. J: Does anybody have anything else that you think we need to do, or that you want to know about the in-depth reading? [brief pause] You may want to check back sometimes to see that you're getting all the detail, because detail gets brought out in this, and something else you need to think about is writer, what's the writer doing and why, why do you think he's doing it. Ah, the writing style, how that affects the story... 

....

Ms. J: When you're reading in-depth, you're going to be looking at it [the story] a lot more deeply, so you want to do a lot more critical kind of reading, where you're thinking about it deeply. (J1, pp. 53-54)

Later in Discussion 1 Ms. Jennings also stated that she wanted the group to look at vocabulary in the book. Additionally, she suggested that the students might jot down questions to bring to the group. (To the best of the researcher's knowledge, students did not record any questions for the discussions.) Furthermore, at the onset of the second session Ms. Jennings informed the students that she wanted to stay out of the discussion as much as possible and to have the students talk about the book. In conclusion, one of Ms. Jennings' strategies was to explicitly discuss group processes, procedures, and expectations with students. Overall, 23% of Ms. Jennings' utterances were assigned the Process code across the three coded discussions.

In keeping with her strategy of verbalizing processes and expectations, Ms. Jennings periodically reminded students to talk to each other throughout the discussions. She issued such reminders particularly when students raised their hands to respond to a teacher question or prompt or when they directed their gazes at her when
making comments. There was quite a bit of student hand-raising in the first discussion. Near the end of that discussion Ms. Jennings told the children, "You probably won't need to hold your hands up, because if you practice not stepping on somebody's toes, kind of waiting, and how you can flow in and out, you'll learn to do that" (J1, p. 56). The amount of hand-raising declined in subsequent discussions. As well as telling the children to talk to each other and not to her, Ms. Jennings used physical distancing to remove herself from the center of attention.

When the children sat on the floor in a circle, Ms. Jennings sat in a chair which was sometimes positioned somewhat apart from the circle. Or, when the group sat at a rectangular table, Ms. Jennings sat at one end of the table while students clustered nearer the other end. Furthermore, in an early discussion when a student looked at the teacher while speaking, Ms. Jennings averted her eyes downward.

As well as encouraging student-student talk, Ms. Jennings encouraged the children to share their personal opinions, responses, and prior knowledge related to the story or to the discussion proceedings. Approximately 32% of Ms. Jennings' total utterances were assigned the Personal code. Of her utterances coded for Category II (Meaning Construction), 54% were given the Personal code. Ms. Jennings sometimes shared prior knowledge related to the story (or to in-depth reading), but she infrequently expressed her own personal interpretations of the text. Instead, many of Ms. Jennings' personal utterances contained reference to the students' opinions, responses, or prior knowledge. For example, in the first discussion Ms. Jennings
distributed copies of *Incident at Hawk's Hill* and asked the group to make predictions about the story based on the cover; students drew on their background knowledge to respond to the teacher's question. During the first discussion Ms. Jennings also asked the children if they had heard of the book or the author and if they had participated in in-depth groups in previous school years.

Ms. Jennings used several strategies to foster and support student talk during the discussions. As already noted, she explicitly told the children to talk to each other, and she invited their personal comments. In addition, she occasionally asked group members if they agreed with statements made by their peers. Furthermore, she entered into the discussions to remind a particularly verbal student to give others a chance to speak, to encourage less assertive students to "jump in," and to urge students to refer to the book to support disputed assertions. She also acknowledged, summarized, or clarified student remarks and prompted students to elaborate on topics they had addressed.

Ms. Jennings periodically used questions as a means of pursuing topics the children had addressed (e.g., clarification or elaboration questions) or as a means of introducing new topics. For example, near the end of the fourth discussion she shifted the discussion topic with this question: "What do you think was the most important thing that happened in the chapters you read for today?" (J4, p. 59). In the three coded discussions, 23% of Ms. Jennings' total utterances were questions coded for Category II (Meaning Construction). While 40% of these questions called for describing responses, a larger percentage, 58%,
called for inferring, generalizing, or evaluating responses. Table 15 presents the percentage of teacher questions coded for Category II in each of the meaning construction codes.
Table 15

Ms. Jennings' Questions Coded for Category II: Percentage in Each of the Meaning Construction Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kind of Meaning Construction</th>
<th>Questions Coded for Category II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing (1)</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferring (2)</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalizing (3)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating (4)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective-Taking (5)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting (6)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown (7)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Ms. Jennings made a total of 723 utterances across the three coded discussions. Of those utterances, 167 (23%) were questions coded for Category II. Percentages in the table were calculated based on the 167 figure.
Ms. Jennings also made statements which prompted talk about new topics or focused the students on a particular aspect of a topic they had previously addressed. For instance, during one discussion the students had mentioned that the female badger in the story had lost part of her foot (in a trap); Ms. Jennings later honed in on this topic by telling the students, "Talk about her [the badger] being trapped" (J4, p. 44). Similarly, the following excerpts from the last discussion illustrate the teacher's use of statements or questions to initiate new topics:

Ms. J: Let's talk about who some of the strong characters were.-- (J7, p. 42)

....

Ms. J: Okay, now I want you to talk about what you think the main theme of the book was.-- (J7, p. 57)

....

Ms. J: Okay, does anybody have anything they want to say about the guy [i.e., Allan Eckert] as a writer? (J7, p. 62)

The previous excerpts also show that Ms. Jennings urged students to engage in literary meaning construction that involved inferring, generalizing, and evaluating.

In summary, Ms. Jennings used several strategies to encourage student-student talk and to foster literary meaning making that included but also went beyond simple description. She addressed in-depth discussion processes and expectations with the students. She explicitly told the children throughout the discussions to talk to each other rather than to her. In addition, she made procedural comments which reminded a verbose student to give others a chance to speak and which urged reticent students to enter into the discussions. Furthermore, Ms.
Jennings invited the students' personal comments. She sometimes summarized, clarified, or requested elaboration on student assertions. She also used questions and statements to encourage students to move beyond simple retelling and to consider facets of the story they had not addressed on their own.

**Patterns in Student Talk**

The students in the *Incident at Hawk's Hill* group made 74% of the total coded discussion utterances. They often talked amongst themselves for sizable stretches of the discussions with few teacher interjections. They frequently overlapped and interrupted each other and completed each others' sentences. The patterns in student talk for the group are described in more detail below.

**Category I, Content.** In the three coded discussions, the majority of student utterances (64%) contained reference to the text. Many student utterances were also assigned the Personal and Conversation Maintenance codes. Additionally, 10% of the students' remarks contained process references. Student process talk was most frequent in the first discussion. Table 16 presents the percentage of total student discussion utterances in each of the content codes.
Table 16

Ms. Jennings' Group: Percentage of Total Student Utterances in Each of the Category I/Content Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Code</th>
<th>Student Utterances in Each of the Content Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( n^a )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text (A)</td>
<td>1298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author (B)</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal (C)</td>
<td>492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process (D)</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation Maintenance (E)</td>
<td>827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments or Projects (FF)</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Presence (FG)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Context (FH)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (I)</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The percentages total more than 100% because many utterances were assigned more than one Category I code.

\( a \) Actual number of student utterances assigned each code across the three coded discussions.

\( b \) A total of 2041 student utterances were coded for Ms. Jennings' group across the three discussions. This number was used to calculate the percentages.
The students' talk about the text focused primarily on the characters and story events. In the first discussion they also discussed the book cover, making predictions about the story based on the jacket illustration and the title. Throughout the discussions the students occasionally read from their books to answer a question, verify a point they were making, provide information, or discuss the meaning of a word in its context. During the group sessions the children generally talked about the most recent chapters they had read, but their comments did not necessarily cover the readings in a sequential manner. That is, they sometimes mentioned a part of the story, moved on to talk about another part of the story, and then returned to the story episode mentioned earlier in the discussion. The students often retold story events, elaborating on each others' remarks and showing a concern for accuracy in their descriptions. For example, when Diane said that the female badger who adopted Ben MacDonald was gone from her den for "three days, or two," Anne responded, "Four, it was four, she was gone for four days..." (J4, p. 42). Interspersed with their retellings, the students made inferences, generalizations, and evaluations related to the story.

In conjunction with discussing the text itself, children shared their personal opinions/responses and prior knowledge related to the story. For example, in the fourth session the students revealed their background knowledge of Indian trapping practices after talking about an animal trapper in the story, Mr. Burton. In addition, the children occasionally made connections between the story and their personal
experiences. Overall, 24% of the students' utterances were assigned the Personal code.

During the discussions students also referred to the process of discussing and the process of reading. The largest bulk of the process talk occurred in the first session. In that session Ms. Jennings prompted the students to suggest discussion rules and to work out for themselves the amount of reading to do before each group meeting. The children subsequently spent several turns talking about group rules and deciding how much of the book they needed to read daily in order to finish it within the week and a half time period stipulated by Ms. Jennings.

Finally, many of the students' utterances (41%) involved conversation maintenance. The children often used signals such as "yeah," "I know," "no," and "but" to acknowledge, agree with, or disagree with the assertions of their peers. They restated previous remarks as well, which also appeared to show acknowledgment, agreement, or continued disagreement. In addition, one verbose student in particular seemed to use restatements as one means of fueling her turns. That is, she sometimes began or continued her turns by repeating the comments of others. Students signaled conditional agreement/partial disagreement (e.g., "yeah, but . . .") with others too, and they attempted to negotiate meanings (e.g., "Well, . . ."). Same-speaker restatements occurred as well, usually after a speaker was interrupted, overlapped, or not acknowledged by other speakers.

The discussion excerpts below contain several examples of student conversation maintenance (in bold type). In the excerpts the students
were talking about the story episode in which Mr. Burton, an unscrupulous trapper, brings a dead badger to the MacDonald family home. Mr. Burton urges Mr. MacDonald to skin the badger and hands him a skinning knife. When Mr. MacDonald prepares to do the job, young Ben MacDonald rushes up to his father and knocks the knife from his hand. Mr. MacDonald, already irritated with Mr. Burton, reflexively strikes Ben. When Anne stated that Ben's father "accidentally" hit Ben, other students responded as follows:

Tony: He [Ben's father] didn't accidentally--
Diane: No, he didn't accidentally--
Anne: Well he said he did when he went into the [inaudible]--
Diane: No he didn't, he said that--
John: He, he [inaudible]--
Anne: He acted like he accidentally--

. . . .
Diane: . . . and he [Ben's father] said the only reason he hit him [Ben] [was] because he was mad at Mr. Burton, and he mixes feelings.
Student: Yeah.
Anne: Right.--
Tony: That's not an accident [inaudible]--

. . . .
Anne: If he [Ben's father] said that he meant to hit Mr. Burton, [inaudible] he didn't.
Diane: He didn't mean to hit Mr. Burton, he was mad at Ben, but still I mean that was kinda rude to do, or like, oh yeah, smack somebody across the face, no that's okay.--
Ms. J: You mean he hit Ben because he was made at Mr. Burton and he had to take it out on somebody,
Diane: Yeah.
Ms. J: [continuing] and he couldn't take it out on Mr. Burton?--
Tony: Yeah.--
Nicole: Yeah.--
Student: Yeah.--

Tony: Well, he [Ben's father] said it clear out of the blue, so, this is the first person who came close [inaudible]--
Nicole: He [Ben's father] mixes feelings-- (J4, pp. 19-21)

Ms. J: Do you think that people do violent things to people that they think can't um,--
John: help you.--

Ms. J: [continuing] retaliate, or can't help themselves?
Nicole: Yeah.--

Ms. J: [continuing] Do you think people tend to hurt people who can't [paused]?
Fred: Well I think that happens.--

Steve: They take it out on other people instead of the person they really want to do it on, but they do it on someone else.

Ms. J: Was it easier to do it to Ben because [inaudible]--?
Nicole: They have to take it out--
Student: I take out [inaudible]--
Student: Yeah, because--
Steve: He [Ben] couldn't do anything back.--

Student: Yeah--

Ms. J: What would have happened if he [Mr. MacDonald] had hit Mr. Burton?--
Diane: Ben was smaller and--
Steve: Then Mr. Burton probably would have hit him back.--

Anne: So it was kind of a [sic] accidental on purpose kind of.-- (J4, pp. 23-25)
Not only do the above excerpts illustrate the students' use of conversation maintenance signals, but they also contain examples of Ms. Jennings asking questions to clarify and extend student thinking on a topic the students were addressing. Of note too is Anne's revision of her view of Mr. MacDonald's motivations and actions. She appeared to consider the comments of others as she moved from stating that Mr. MacDonald hit his son accidentally to concluding, or perhaps conceding, that his action was "accidental on purpose."

**Category II, Meaning Construction.** Of the total student utterances in the three coded discussions, 35% were assigned the Describing code. Approximately 31% contained meaning construction beyond simple description. The researcher coded 74% of the students' utterances for Category II; 26% were not assigned a Category II code. Most of the student utterances that were not given a meaning construction code were conversation maintenance signals. Of the student utterances coded for Category II, 48% involved describing, while almost 42% involved inferring, generalizing, evaluating, perspective-taking, or reflecting. The 11% of student Category II utterances coded Unknown is largely indicative of the amount of overlapping talk and interruptions during the discussions. Table 17 presents the percentage of student utterances coded for Category II that were assigned to each of the meaning construction codes.
Table 17

Ms. Jennings' Group: Student Utterances Coded for Category II --

Percentage in Each of the Meaning Construction Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kind of Meaning Construction</th>
<th>Student Utterances Coded for Category II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing (1)</td>
<td>724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferring (2)</td>
<td>398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalizing (3)</td>
<td>88</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluating (4)</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective-Taking (5)</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown (7)</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1517</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Of the 2041 total coded student utterances, 1517 (74%) were coded for Category II. The 1517 figure was used to calculate the percentages.
Category III, Function. Approximately 94% of the students' utterances were statements. The remaining 6% were questions. Less than 1% of their remarks were tag or rhetorical questions. Students asked questions that were coded as conversation maintenance signals, questions about the reading assignments for the group, and occasionally questions about the story or a peer's interpretation of the story. For example, in the last discussion the students talked about the ending of the book: the female badger who adopted Ben gets shot, but whether she survives or not is inconclusive. John asked, "Didn't he [sic, she] die?" Tony replied, "Well, you don't know if he [sic, she] died or not, 'cause it doesn't say" (J7, p. 5).

Relationships Between Teacher Strategies and Student Talk

Ms. Jennings' explicit talk about discussion processes and expectations and her encouragement of student-student interactions appeared to be correlated with certain patterns in the students' talk during the in-depth group meetings. Specifically, her strategies contributed to the creation of a context in which students made decisions about group rules and reading assignments and discussed the story amongst themselves with minimal to moderate teacher input.

During the discussions the children described characters and events and elaborated on each other's retellings. In the first session Ms. Jennings told the children that story details were brought out in in-depth discussions. Indeed, the students delved into the details of the text, clarifying, crystallizing, and mulling over story events and their significance. They expressed personal interpretations and evaluations as
well. They also shared prior knowledge related to the story, and they made generalizations about human and animal nature. In addition, the students occasionally considered a character's perspective or imagined how they would react if they were in a character's shoes.

Ms. Jennings' strategy of interjecting questions and statements during the discussions prompted the students to clarify or elaborate on their assertions and to explore facets of the story that they had not considered on their own. With teacher prompting as well as through their own student-student interactions, the children engaged in literary meaning making that included but also went beyond simple description.

In conclusion, the students had the opportunity to talk with peers about their literary understandings of *Incident at Hawk's Hill*. Ms. Jennings explicitly encouraged their peer-peer talk, supported the expression of personal opinions and responses, and sometimes guided students into an exploration of story aspects not previously considered.

**Comparisons of the Three Teachers' Discussions**

Generally speaking, for all three groups the small group discussions were contexts in which the student participants had the opportunity to explore and express their understandings of the novels they read. In each group the students made a larger percentage of the coded discussion utterances than did their teacher; however, each group's discussions were unique, and each teacher had her own style of interacting with the student participants.

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of total coded discussion utterances made by the teacher and by students in each of the three
groups. Then, Table 18 presents the percentage of total student utterances in each of the Category I/Content codes for each group. Following the illustrations, similarities and differences across the three groups in terms of the teachers' strategies and the students' patterns of talk are discussed.

![Figure 1. Percentage of Total Coded Discussion Utterances Made by Teachers and by Students in Each Group.](image)

**Figure 1.** Percentage of Total Coded Discussion Utterances Made by Teachers and by Students in Each Group.
Table 18

Comparison of Student Utterances in Each of the Category I/Content Codes Across the Three Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Code</th>
<th>Roberts</th>
<th></th>
<th>Scott</th>
<th></th>
<th>Jennings</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>920</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1298</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation Maintenance</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>827</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments or Projects</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Presence</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>Classroom Context</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Numbers (n) and percentages (%) are based on all coded student utterances for each group. The percentages total more than 100% because many utterances were assigned more than one Category I code.
Content Patterns

In the coded discussions for Ms. Scott’s and Ms. Jennings’ groups, 63% and 64% of the students' utterances, respectively, were assigned the Text code for content. In contrast, 39% of the students' utterances in Ms. Roberts' group referred to the story itself. Ms. Jennings set the stage in the first discussion for her students to engage primarily in literary meaning making by revealing her expectations for the group to talk in-depth about the book. She explicitly discussed group processes and procedures with the children, and she explained the nature of in-depth reading and in-depth discussions. Through a different strategy, namely teacher guidance on the content of the talk, Ms. Scott kept her students focused on the text during the discussions. She put the children back into the chapters they had read for each meeting by referring them to specific page numbers, reading excerpts from those pages, and asking questions. Conversely, for Ms. Roberts' group the literature study meetings were not comprised solely of discussion about the story itself. Group read alouds, initiated by Ms. Roberts, and teacher sanctioned project talk were also a substantial part of the sessions. The sessions were typically lengthier than those of the other two groups, so roughly the same amount of time was spent on discussion, versus read aloud, as was spent in the other two groups.

The three coded discussions for Ms. Roberts' group accentuated the participants' uneven focus on literary meaning construction. Specifically, in Discussions 1 and 5, the group spent time reading aloud from the text. Students engaged in group read alouds in four other
discussions as well. Similarly, participants spent time discussing projects (e.g., activities to do upon completion of the book) in four of the discussions, including Discussions 5 and 9. As noted previously, Discussions 5 and 9 over represented the degree of project talk that occurred across all nine discussions. Nevertheless, project talk appeared to reveal and generate student enthusiasm for extending (Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1993) the book. The trade-off in some of the discussions was less talk about the story itself.

Each teacher prompted the students to discuss the meaning of unusual or unfamiliar words in the stories. In Ms. Roberts' and Ms. Jennings' groups, talk about vocabulary words was intermittent and typically short-lived. In contrast, talk about unfamiliar language, namely the characters' dialect, frequently occurred in Ms. Scott's group.

In all three groups many teacher and student utterances were assigned the Personal code for content. When the subset of utterances assigned a Category II/Kind of Meaning Construction code in particular was considered, the percentage of teacher and student utterances coded Personal for content (within the subset) was quite high across all three groups, as Table 19 illustrates.
Table 19

**Teacher and Student Utterances Assigned the Personal Code within the Subset of Utterances Coded for Category II/meaning Construction**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total No. of Category II Utterances</th>
<th>No. of Category II Utterances Coded Personal</th>
<th>% of Category II Utterances Coded Personal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberts</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennings</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberts' Group</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott's Group</td>
<td>994</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennings' Group</td>
<td>1517</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each teacher invited personal utterances during the discussions. Students in all of the groups expressed personal opinions and responses. Teachers and students in each group shared prior knowledge related to the story. There were, however, some differences between groups in terms of the type of personal utterances most commonly made when all discussions for each group were taken into consideration.

In Ms. Roberts' group, personal experiences/narratives related to the story were shared more frequently than in the other two groups. This pattern appeared to be related to the teacher's strategy of making
connections between the story and her own experiences or the students' experiences. Both Ms. Roberts and Ms. Scott shared their own personal responses to the stories during the discussions; Ms. Roberts tended to make personal experience connections, and Ms. Scott tended to offer her personal interpretations of the text. These teachers seemed to play a dual role; namely, that of teacher/model and fellow reader. In contrast, Ms. Jennings seldom related personal narratives or expressed her own interpretations of Incident at Hawk's Hill. This practice appeared to be in keeping with her stated desire to stay out of the discussions as much as possible. Ms. Jennings' role was like that of a coach. She stayed on the sidelines for much of the discussions, but she sometimes interjected statements and questions to focus, guide, or extend the students' talk about the book.

There were also differences between the groups in the quantity of teacher and student process talk. Figure 2 illustrates the differences.

![Figure 2. Percentage of Teacher and Student Utterances Assigned the Process Code in Each Group.](image-url)
Across the three coded discussions for the Incident at Hawk's Hill group, 23% of Ms. Jennings' utterances and 10% of the students' utterances were assigned the Process code for content. Conversely, 6% and 8% of Ms. Roberts' and Ms. Scott's utterances, respectively, were coded Process for content, and their students made few process utterances (3% in each group). The percentages highlight Ms. Jennings' explicitness on group-related processes. The percentages also reveal that while the other two teachers addressed the processes of discussing, reading, and/or interpreting, they did not make process talk a substantive part of the discussions.

In each group, many teacher and student utterances contained conversation maintenance signals. Students as well as the teachers acknowledged, agreed with, and/or disagreed with the comments of fellow group participants. The amount of conversation maintenance remarks made by students shows that they gave attention to and considered the comments of others. It also appears to show that the students, in general, were highly engaged in the discussions. (Of course across all three groups some children were verbose while others were reticent.)

A pattern emerged across the groups in terms of student use of conversation maintenance. When the coded discussions of the three groups were compared, there was a correlation between the percentage of teacher utterances in the discussions and the percentage of student utterances that consisted of or contained conversation maintenance signals. For all three groups, student use of conversation maintenance
was substantial; however, in general, students seemed to take even more responsibility for sustaining the discussions and for showing engagement with fellow speakers when there was less teacher talk. Figure 3 depicts the trend.

Figure 3. Total Teacher Discussion Utterances and Student Conversation Maintenance: A Trend in the Percentages.

In all three groups, teachers made the majority of a certain type of conversation maintenance utterances, namely procedural comments. Specifically, they nominated speakers, issued procedural directives, and/or made distinct initiations of new topics (i.e., marked episode changes). Ms. Roberts in particular managed student turn-taking by nominating speakers, often those whose hands were raised. Table 20 presents the percentage of total coded teacher utterances that were assigned the Conversation Maintenance code alone for content.
The table illustrates that all of the teachers used many of their discussion turns solely for conversation maintenance purposes. Ms. Roberts in particular made a large percentage of conversation maintenance-only utterances. From time to time all three teachers also encouraged less verbal students to take a turn by nominating them to speak or by urging them to "jump in" (Ms. Jennings). In addition, it was the teachers, rather than the students, who made the majority of the marked episode changes in the discussions. Thus, regardless of their varying styles, the teachers spent time handling procedural aspects of the literature meetings.

**Meaning Construction Patterns**

Across the literature meetings of all three groups, describing was a common form of meaning construction for students. The percentage of
utterances that involved meaning construction beyond the literal level was also substantial for all three groups. As Table 21 illustrates, when students made utterances that were coded for Category II, 38% (Roberts' group), 45% (Scott's group), and almost 42% (Jennings' group) of those utterances involved inferring, generalizing, evaluating, perspective-taking, and/or reflecting. Beyond description, inferring was the predominant kind of meaning construction for the children. Overall, having the opportunity to share their literary understandings in the small group discussions appeared to enable students to construct meaning that included but also surpassed simply describing elements of the stories. Teacher questions and statements also prompted students to make generalizations or to engage in perspective-taking, for example.
Table 21
Comparison of Student Utterances Assigned a Category II/Meaning Construction Code Across the Three Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning Construction Code</th>
<th>Roberts</th>
<th></th>
<th>Scott</th>
<th></th>
<th>Jennings</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>724</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferring</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalizing</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective-Taking</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>994</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1517</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Numbers (n) and percentages (%) are based on the subset of student utterances for each group that were assigned a Category II/Meaning Construction code.
For all three teachers, the largest percentage of their questions coded for Kind of Meaning Construction (Category II) involved describing and inferring. The teachers differed greatly in the quantity of substantive content questions they asked, however. There were also differences between teachers in the quantity of questions they asked that involved meaning construction that went beyond the literal level. Tables 22 and 23 provide comparative information on the content and quantity of teacher questions coded for Category II.

Table 22

Percentage of Total Teacher Discussion Utterances That Were Questions Coded for Category II/meaning Construction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Roberts</th>
<th>Scott</th>
<th>Jennings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category II questions</td>
<td>37 6%</td>
<td>173 22%</td>
<td>167 23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Numbers (n) represent the total number of teacher questions assigned a Category II code across the three coded discussions. Percentages (%) were calculated by dividing the number of Category II questions (n) by the total number of teacher discussion utterances across the three coded discussions for each group.
Table 23

**Teacher Questions Coded for Category II/meaning Construction:**

**Percentage in Each of the Meaning Construction Codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning Construction Code</th>
<th>Roberts</th>
<th>Scott</th>
<th>Jennings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>$n$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferring</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalizing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective-Taking</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Numbers ($n$) and percentages (%) are based on the subset of teacher utterances in each group that were questions assigned a Category II/meaning Construction code.
Asking substantive content questions (i.e., questions coded for kind of meaning construction) was not a prevalent practice for Ms. Roberts. Only 6% of her total coded utterances were questions assigned a Category II/meaning Construction code. Virtually all of these questions called for describing or inferring responses. Ms. Roberts more often used substantive content statements to participate in and to sustain the discussions. On the other hand, over 20% of Ms. Scott’s and Ms. Jennings’ total coded utterances were questions coded for Category II. Both Ms. Scott and Ms. Jennings asked many describing and inferring questions. They also asked questions beyond inferring, in varying degrees. Specifically, 9% of Ms. Scott’s Category II questions and about 18% of Ms. Jennings’ Category II questions involved meaning construction beyond inferring.

In conclusion, several similarities and differences were noted when the discussions of the three focal groups were compared. Although each group’s discussions were unique, and each teacher used distinctive strategies for interacting with the student participants, the observed literature group sessions were contexts in which students shared and constructed literary understandings of the chapter books they read. In the following section the researcher discusses the relationships between the teachers’ observed discussion practices and their stated perspectives on literature discussion groups, including the particular groups observed for this study.
Relationships Between the Teachers' Practices and Perspectives

Qualitative researchers strive to understand the participants' perspectives on their experiences and actions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Erickson, 1986; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Patton, 1990). Thus, the success of the literature discussions observed for this study must be viewed in light of the teachers' stated goals. For example, were teacher expectations for student talk and learning met in the focal group discussions? Did student and teacher roles in the observed discussions parallel the teachers' perspectives on those roles? On the other hand, the researcher acknowledges that she also viewed the focal discussions through her own lens. As Ball (1990) states, "The presence, the effect, and the biases and selections of the researcher cannot be removed from qualitative research" (p. 167). Specifically, the researcher considered the efficacy of the discussions in light of previous studies and theories that suggest the fruitful possibilities for literary meaning making that exist in small group contexts. The researcher's perspectives are presented more fully in the next chapter.

The teachers' perspectives on the use of literature discussion groups in their classrooms were presented in Chapter IV. The teachers also reflected on the focal group discussions, particularly in the individual member check interviews and in the closing group teacher meeting. Relationships between the teachers' practices, as observed in the focal group discussions, and their perspectives are explored in this section. First, Tables 24, 25, and 26 illustrate comparisons between each teachers' stated goals for literature discussions and observed student
behaviors in the focal groups. Following the segments on the individual teachers' practices and perspectives, the closing group teacher meeting is discussed.
### Ms. Roberts: Stated Goals for Literature Study Groups and Observed Student Behaviors in the Focal Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stated Goal</th>
<th>Observed Student Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discuss story elements</td>
<td>Discussion of Anastasia and the events in her life, including utterances at and beyond the level of describing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See relationships between text and life</td>
<td>Personal utterances connecting the story to life experiences and prior knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become aware of author's writing style</td>
<td>Mention of Lowry's writing style and speculation about her reasons for writing <em>Anastasia Krupnik</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss new vocabulary/word meanings in context</td>
<td>Periodic, short-lived talk about unfamiliar words in the story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act as leaders in the group</td>
<td>Frequent reliance on teacher to orchestrate turn-taking through use of hand-raising; use of teacher-nominated turns to extend talk on a topic or to shift the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy literature</td>
<td>Eager hand-raising; lively discussion; sustained talk about book-related projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do culminating project(s) related to the book</td>
<td>Wrote titles for untitled chapters; made book wheels, book cubes, paper Christmas trees, and pillow covers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stated Goal</td>
<td>Observed Student Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move beyond retelling in discussions</td>
<td>Utterances at inferring, generalizing, evaluating, perspective-taking, and reflecting levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reach &quot;beyond the book&quot;</td>
<td>Generalizations about human nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about author's choices, devices, style</td>
<td>Discussion of Eckert’s style of writing and choices; e.g., discussion of how he ended Incident at Hawk's Hill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss vocabulary</td>
<td>Periodic, short-lived talk about unusual or unfamiliar words in the story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support assertions by referring back to the book</td>
<td>Occasional reference back to the book to prove or support a point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice disagreements with fellow group members</td>
<td>Conversation maintenance utterances indicating disagreement; debates over veracity of recalled story elements or literary interpretations; concern for accuracy in descriptions of story details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask questions other than yes-no questions</td>
<td>Few questions observed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine group reading assignments</td>
<td>Collaborative decision-making on number of pages to read for each session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do a book-related project</td>
<td>Project not done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stated Goal</td>
<td>Observed Student Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss a book critically</td>
<td>Utterances at inferring, generalizing, evaluating, and perspective-taking levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore characters' feelings</td>
<td>Inferences about characters' feelings and actions; consideration of a character's point of view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examine author's techniques and style</td>
<td>Periodic short-lived comments about Burch's style, choices, or background -- largely teacher-initiated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about vocabulary/ unusual language</td>
<td>Discussion of characters' regional dialect and unfamiliar words in <em>Ida Early Comes Over the Mountain</em> (usually tied to an ongoing written assignment to jot down page numbers containing examples of characters' mountain expressions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively participate in discussions; question and comment on other's remarks</td>
<td>Frequent overlapping talk; use of conversation maintenance signals to indicate agreement, acknowledgment, and occasional disagreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show enthusiasm for reading</td>
<td>Overlapping talk; lively discussion among most group members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do extensions/projects related to the book</td>
<td>Extensions not done</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ms. Roberts

Expectations for Student Talk and Learning

Many of Ms. Roberts' stated goals for student talk and learning in literature study groups were met in the *Anastasia Krupnik* discussions. The fourth grade students talked about story elements, particularly the main character and the events that occurred in her life. They discussed how Anastasia had changed over the course of the story. They noted relationships between the story and their own lives. Concerning making personal connections, Ms. Roberts explained in the member check interview, "I think when you can tie it [the book] back into a personal experience or something that they're familiar with, they tend to remember it, and I think they tend to pick up more, or get more out of it." In addition, the children appeared to genuinely enjoy the story, showing an eagerness to share their thoughts during the discussions and a sustained interest in engaging in book-related projects. All of these features of the students' talk paralleled Ms. Roberts' stated expectations for literature group discussions.

Another goal of Ms. Roberts' was for students in literature study groups to become aware of the author's style. Although the focal group rarely talked about the author, in a noncoded discussion the students did broach the subject of Lois Lowry's writing style, and they speculated on her reasons for writing the book. Specifically, they suggested the possibility that Lowry was writing about her own life, or about a family member, in *Anastasia Krupnik*. Ms. Roberts indicated to the researcher
that she was amazed and pleased that the children brought up the author before she had a chance to do so herself.

Ms. Roberts had also reported that she wanted students to note new vocabulary in the literature books they read. She did in fact periodically invite the focal group students to talk about unfamiliar words in *Anastasia Krupnik*, and she typically prompted them to read the words within the context of the story as meanings were discussed (or sometimes explained by Ms. Roberts). Vocabulary talk was usually short-lived, but it did occur in several of the discussions. When the researcher mentioned this pattern of discussing word meanings in the story's context in the member check interview, Ms. Roberts explained:

Yeah, a lot of those different strategies and ideas . . . come from what we have to basically cover in our [curriculum] goals and objectives . . . and so if you do a literature study you've got to make sure that you pick up as many of the different techniques and strategies as you can [e.g., using context clues to determine word meanings], to justify using a literature book, because otherwise you need to be right in that old basal and the workbook. Thus, in Ms. Roberts' view, basal materials covered the types of comprehension-related skills that were listed in curriculum objectives, and those same skills needed to be addressed when using children's literature in order to justify not using basals.

Finally, Ms. Roberts expected students to do culminating projects as an outcome of literature study groups. Indeed, the focal group participants did several projects related to *Anastasia Krupnik*. As a
group they wrote titles for the untitled chapters in the story. They made individual "book wheels" (commercial) and "book cubes" as well as construction paper Christmas trees and pillow covers that depicted aspects of the story. They also wrote about the story in their literature logs after the discussion sessions were concluded. In addition, Ms. Roberts said that she planned to take group participants on a visit to a nursing home before the end of the school year. Thus, the students extended the book beyond the discussions with a number of activities.

**Student and Teacher Roles in the Discussions**

Ms. Roberts had reported that she wanted students to be the leaders in literature study discussions, sharing their understandings of the story with each other. In the focal group sessions, the students had ample discussion turns to express their thoughts on *Anastasia Krupnik* and even to talk about book-related projects they were interested in pursuing. They used conversation maintenance signals, particularly acknowledgment and agreement markers, which showed their engagement with fellow group members. From the researcher's point of view, however, Ms. Roberts led the discussions in the sense that she took primary responsibility for orchestrating the turn-taking and made the vast majority of the marked episode changes. On the other hand, the students maintained some control of the content of the group's talk, using teacher-nominated turns to extend talk about a particular topic or to shift the discussion topic.

Ms. Roberts had stated that her role in literature discussions included steering students to topics she wanted to cover and asking
questions when talk was not flowing. It appeared that Ms. Roberts asked few questions during the focal discussions at least in part because talk rarely stalled in the group. As Ms. Roberts asserted in the member check interview, "I didn't have to push them that much to really think about something or do something; it was just like, 'okay, you guys are so cooperative and you're just doing what I want you to do; I don't have to tell you, or explain this, or show you that much.'" For example, as previously noted, Ms. Roberts indicated that she had intended to ask the students about the author's style in one of the discussions, but the students brought it up themselves before she broached the subject.

During the member check interview the researcher also asked Ms. Roberts to respond to the researcher's perception that the students often directed their talk to Ms. Roberts. Ms. Roberts agreed with the researcher's observation and said,

That's one thing that bothers me, if you're [the teacher] sitting right in the group with them, and even when you're facing in a circle, it seems like they still think they have to talk to me rather than as a group. . . . I'm taking this workshop on cooperative learning, so maybe with using cooperative learning more next year it'll help to get away from me being the main focus.

Thus, Ms. Roberts asserted that she did not wish to be the center of attention during literature discussions. Furthermore, she indicated that her continuing professional development (i.e., taking a workshop on cooperative learning) might provide her with the means of shifting students' focus away from her in the future.
With regard to helping students take turns in the focal discussions, Ms. Roberts stated in the member check interview that "if you [the teacher] don't, with that group there's some that really will talk the whole time." Thus, from the teacher's perspective, managing turn-taking gave less talkative students a chance to speak. Indeed, the two students in the group whom Ms. Roberts considered shy did at times assert themselves during the discussions. Concerning one of those children, Ms. Roberts noted, "in a whole class discussion, she's not going to be the one that'll volunteer to talk, and to give suggestions. And now she's really, you know, where she's with just these girls, and they really feel comfortable. . . . and I can see that it's really helped her a lot, coming out."

As well as sharing her views on turn-taking procedures, Ms. Roberts gave her reasons for elaborating on or justifying student responses during the focal group discussions. The researcher elicited the teacher's perspective on this researcher-observed pattern during the member check interview. Ms. Roberts explained:

I always worry for fear that somebody's gonna say, 'well that's not what I thought it was,' and I wanted them to make sure that they understand that there's a lot of different viewpoints that you can take from literature . . . I mean, if you and I read a poem, we're gonna view it two different ways more than likely, and I want them to be able to understand that there's not one set answer. You know like in the reading workbook, if you do a workbook page there, it's pretty blah, there's one set answer and that's the only
way you can do it, whereas with literature . . . there's so many
different ways you can go from it. And then too, it [supporting
students' responses] helps them to know that they were successful,
and it makes them feel good too I think.

Thus, Ms. Roberts indicated that she supported the students' responses
during the literature discussions for affective reasons -- to help students
feel successful and "good" -- and for reasons tied to literary
interpretation. She wanted students to understand that there is more
than one right way to interpret a story, and she felt that explaining the
plausibility of a child's response was a way to convey that message.

Of interest is the fact that Ms. Jennings, like Ms. Roberts, wanted
her students to understand that different readers will have different
interpretations of the same text, but Ms. Jennings' strategy for conveying
this view was quite different from the tack taken by Ms. Roberts.
Because this particular aspect of the two teacher's approaches invites
comparison, Ms. Jennings' practices and perspectives are discussed next.

Ms. Jennings

Expectations for Student Talk and Learning

Several of Ms. Jennings' stated goals for student talk and learning
in in-depth groups were met in the Incident at Hawk's Hill discussions.
The fifth grade students spent time describing story events, but they
often went beyond retelling too, making inferences about the plot or
evaluating a character's actions for example. They made generalizations
about human nature which stemmed from talk about characters in the
story. In the member check interview, Ms. Jennings described these
generalizations as examples of the students going "beyond the book." The children also addressed the author's writing style. Finally, they occasionally looked back into the book itself for evidence to support their assertions. All of these features of the students' talk paralleled Ms. Jennings' stated expectations for in-depth discussions.

Ms. Jennings also told both the researcher and the student participants that she expected disagreements in in-depth discussions. In the first focal discussion she explained to the children that arguments were likely to occur because everyone would not have the same interpretation of the book. The students did indeed voice disagreement with each other over recalled story elements or literary interpretations in the focal group discussions. Ms. Jennings usually said little during student-student debates. In the member check interview Ms. Jennings stated, "they [i.e., the students participants] are an argumentative group, which can be great, as far as educational issues are concerned. I mean when people really talk about things and argue, unless it's just petty stuff." Therefore, Ms. Jennings valued and sanctioned argumentation when there were varying perspectives on characters or events in the book. On the other hand, Ms. Roberts appeared to try to shield students from possible dissenting remarks by justifying their assertions about the story. The two teachers' dissimilar strategies were outgrowths of the same view, namely, that there are likely to be varying interpretations of the same text when it is read by more than one reader.

Another goal of Ms. Jennings' was for students to discuss vocabulary in the in-depth books they read. Participants periodically
mentioned unusual or unfamiliar words in the story during the Incident at Hawk's Hill discussions. Ms. Jennings usually urged the students to read the context in which the words appeared as meanings were discussed. In the member check interview the teacher expressed her views on discussing vocabulary with students:

I know there's a part of the whole language, or the informal, or whatever, that thinks you don't touch any of that kind of stuff [e.g., vocabulary]. I think that's kind of out at the edge of it, but to me, without enriching their vocabulary, if they just leave out, or delete everything that they don't know, how do they grow? They miss so much in a book. And so, I deal with it. These kids [i.e., the focal group students] had a pretty good handle on things, so I didn't do as much [i.e., with vocabulary].

Thus, Ms. Jennings expressed disagreement with extremist whole language/informal positions on the practice of talking about word meanings in a story. She indicated that in her view discussing particular words in a book helps students to build their vocabulary and to gain a better understanding of the story.

Ms. Jennings had also reported that she wanted students to ask questions that required more than simple yes or no answers during in-depth discussions. In two of the focal group sessions Ms. Jennings did suggest to the children that they write down questions to bring to the group, but this suggestion was not pursued by the teacher or by the students in subsequent discussions. The children infrequently asked
substantive questions during the literature group sessions. Instead, they sustained the discussions with statements.

Finally, Ms. Jennings originally planned for the students to do a project related to the book after Christmas vacation (the last group discussion ended shortly before the start of the school holiday). She had reported that she expected in-depth group participants to share their book with the class through a project or a presentation; however, as a result of circumstances unrelated to the research study, the focal group did not do a project. The children did write responses to the story in their Reading Notebooks after the discussion sessions were concluded.

**Student and Teacher Roles in the Discussions**

Ms. Jennings had indicated to the researcher and to the students that she wanted the students to carry the bulk of the discussions. Indeed, in the *Incident at Hawk's Hill* group, the children made many more discussion utterances than did their teacher. They talked amongst themselves for sizable stretches of the sessions, and they used conversation maintenance signals to show their engagement with each other. With the teacher's prompting the students also suggested rules for the discussions and made decisions about their reading assignments for the group. Ms. Jennings, however, did make the majority of the marked episode changes during the group sessions, therefore guiding the course of the discussions to some extent.

With regard to her role in in-depth discussions, Ms. Jennings had reported that she "stayed out" as much as possible but that she also stepped in to point out aspects of a book that students were not likely to
notice on their own. During the observed discussions Ms. Jennings did at times remain somewhat removed, physically as well as verbally, from the group, sitting slightly apart from the students and saying little. She also interjected questions and statements to urge the children to elaborate on their understandings or to talk about facets of the story they had not addressed on their own. "Lifting" students, moving them beyond the lowest level of comprehension, was a stated priority of Ms. Jennings' for in-depth groups. The kinds of questions she asked in the observed discussions appeared to reflect her goals. Specifically, many of her questions called for inferring, generalizing, or evaluating responses.

In the member check interview the researcher remarked on Ms. Jennings' use of lifting questions. Furthermore, the researcher said that it seemed occasionally that Ms. Jennings had a particular point in mind that she wanted the students to understand. The teacher's response was as follows: "Those kinds of things [e.g., setting, mood], they need a little help along the way to recognize... if you use examples and talk about them, it's kind of a mimicry, they then look for those kinds of things. Modeling I guess, is what I try to do." The researcher also noted that Ms. Jennings at times asked lifting questions when students were engaged in retelling. Ms. Jennings explained, "If you don't do that [i.e., ask lifting questions], and they get started with the retelling, that may be all you get in an in-depth group." Later in the member check interview Ms. Jennings stated,

If they [children] haven't had lots and lots of experiences with anything else other than retelling, that's what they'll do, because
that's the easiest and lowest level of comprehension. Now after they get skilled at doing something else, why they begin to move away from it. You can get them past it in the earlier years, but you have to work at it. You just can't expect kids to read and talk about books to each other and really grow as readers, well they do in some ways, but they don't learn how to read between the lines and to pick up the nuances, and to get deeply into the story.

Thus, Ms. Jennings conveyed that part of her role in the groups was to push students to go beyond simple description in their discussions of a chapter book, exploring nuances of a story and deepening their literary understandings.

Like Ms. Jennings, Ms. Scott had reported that her role in in-depth groups included "stretching" students, helping them grow as readers. Ms. Scott's perspectives and practices are discussed below.

**Ms. Scott**

**Expectations for Student Talk and Learning**

Many of Ms. Scott's stated goals for student talk and learning in in-depth groups were met in the *Ida Early* discussions. The fourth grade students made inferences about the characters' feelings and actions. They considered a character's point of view or speculated on what they would do if they were in a character's shoes. They made generalizations as an outgrowth of their talk about the story. Throughout the group meetings the children also discussed the unusual language in the book, namely, the characters' regional dialect. Additionally, the frequent interruptions, overlapping talk, and use of conversation maintenance
signals during the discussions appeared to indicate the students' engagement with the book and with their fellow group members. All of these features of the students' talk paralleled Ms. Scott's stated expectations for in-depth discussions.

Another goal of Ms. Scott's was for students to examine the author's techniques in books they read for in-depth discussions. She did prompt an awareness of the author during the Ida Early discussions, noting Robert Burch's style and background with the students. Thus, talk about the author, although usually short-lived, did occur in several of the focal group sessions.

Although she had reported that her in-depth groups typically did extensions related to their books, Ms. Scott did not ask the focal students to do a book extension with Ida Early. She had done an in-depth group earlier in the school year than usual at the request of the researcher, and the focal group concluded its last discussion on the day before Thanksgiving vacation. Ms. Scott indicated that her fall schedule precluded additional in-depth group-related work beyond the holiday.

Student and Teacher Roles in the Discussions

Ms. Scott had asserted that she wanted students in in-depth groups to be active participants in the discussions, listening to and communicating with each other. In the focal group sessions, the students did talk with each other, as well as with Ms. Scott, about the story. They acknowledged the remarks of others, and they also signaled agreement or disagreement with fellow group members.
In terms of her role in in-depth discussions, Ms. Scott had stated that she prepared questions to bring to the group, asked open-ended as well as recall questions, drew students' attention to vocabulary or unusual language in the story, kept the discussions focused on the book, and nominated students to speak when necessary to involve them in the discussions. Simply put, Ms. Scott fulfilled her self-defined role in the focal group discussions. She at times nominated particular children to speak. She referred the students to specific pages in the most recent chapters read, guiding the content of the talk during the discussions. She asked the students to make note of the characters' unusual dialect as they read the story, and examples of this dialect were discussed in many of the group meetings. Finally, Ms. Scott wrote questions in the margins of her copy of *Ida Early*, and many of those questions surfaced in the observed sessions.

Ms. Scott had expressed concern about the comprehension abilities of some of the in-depth group participants. The kinds of questions she asked during the observed discussions appeared to reflect that concern. Specifically, many of her questions called for describing or inferring responses. In the member check interview, when the researcher noted Ms. Scott's use of recall (and inferring) questions, Ms. Scott responded, "Obviously I was doing that [i.e., asking recall questions] for a reason with those particular people." She also said she did not think she usually asked predominantly recall-type questions. In the coded discussions for her group, Ms. Scott did ask many higher level questions as well as describing questions.
According to Ms. Scott, she typically assumed a directive role in the first in-depth groups assembled in her classroom. In the member check interview she acknowledged that she was directive in the observed discussions. As she explained:

Because it's like anything, it's getting their feet wet and letting them know what it's all about. Because just to pull them over and suddenly start bombarding them with, 'well, tell me how you felt about the book,' it's kind of tough, especially for those first-time people. You know, you'll get a response, but it won't be as in-depth, which carries you on to other questions.

Also, Ms. Scott said that "it [i.e., her degree of directiveness with a group] depends on who's in the group and what direction it takes. Some groups are a lot more page by page, and others are more just, 'What did you think? Let's talk about it.'" Thus, from Ms. Scott's perspective, less experienced students needed more teacher guidance in a discussion group to be able to talk about a book "in-depth." Furthermore, Ms. Scott conveyed that her role in the groups was student- and context-specific.

Closing Teacher Meeting

The final meeting with the three teacher participants was conducted within a month of the last researcher-observed group discussion. The meeting brought closure to the study and gave the teachers an opportunity to share their thoughts on both the observed discussions and on literature discussion groups in general. Generally speaking, the teachers reiterated many of the views on the focal
discussions that they had shared with the researcher in individual interviews. Thus, data from the closing meeting triangulated several patterns noted by the researcher in individual teacher interviews and in the observed discussions. Questions asked by the researcher during the meeting are listed in Appendix B. Sample teacher perspectives shared in the meeting are summarized below.

**Literature Discussion Groups: Benefits and Drawbacks**

When asked to reflect on what worked or what did not work in the focal group discussions, the teachers expressed their views. Ms. Jennings stated, "Well I think in ours it worked for me to stay out. It happened to be a group that would pick up the ball and roll with it." Similarly, Ms. Roberts said, "See I think my group worked really well. It's like they all just clicked together, and you could start just one question at the very beginning, and they took it right from there. . . . they all had to have something to say." On the downside, Ms. Scott noted, "Because I was limited to just fourth graders, I ended up with some strong personalities, and not all my fourth graders brought back their permission letters, so I was somewhat limited in who I could pick." She said she might have "split them [i.e., the more opinionated group members] out more in other groups." Thus, the conditions of the study yielded a less than ideal group make-up from Ms. Scott's point of view.

All of the teachers agreed that at times they had to contend with other students in their classrooms during the observed group discussions. The researcher told the teachers that she thought it was important to point out that their discussions took place in the context of
their classrooms; the teachers concurred. Thus, the discussion category system included a "Classroom Context" content code. Ms. Jennings indicated that in previous years she had not had problems with other students misbehaving during in-depth group meetings and that her present class was particularly troublesome. According to Ms. Scott, there were disruptions in her class during the focal discussions in part because she had not yet developed a "classroom of readers." Thus, although the rest of her students were supposed to be reading silently during the focal group sessions, many were not yet interested in sustained independent reading. Ms. Roberts simply noted that she too had to attend to other students in her room when meeting with the focal group. She also agreed with Ms. Scott that part of her problem was that many of her students were not "classroom readers." Although from the researcher's perspective the outside interruptions/distractions that impinged on the focal groups were not excessive or disabling, the teachers were clearly sensitive to them.

The teachers were also asked, "What do you see as the benefits of doing the groups [in general] for you and the students?" Ms. Scott answered that it "opens up divergent thinking, and how we all interpret things a little bit differently." Ms. Roberts concurred, stating, "... they see all these different ideas that they had, and that they all could be right." In addition, Ms. Scott noted that doing the focal group in particular was a benefit to her because it enabled her to make sure that some of the participating students (i.e., those with questionable comprehension abilities) could comprehend a book that was
"appropriate fourth grade reading." Ms. Roberts stated, "And I think some of those books, if we don't [introduce them to students in a literature study], the kids will never pick up some of these books."

Finally, Ms. Jennings asserted, "Well, I think that some of them [i.e., student group members] value reading too, because they see other people as really interested, and it takes them to a different level, where they're really talking it out and determining things and being responsible for looking back to the book to support [what they say]."

When asked if they saw any drawbacks to conducting literature discussion groups, Ms. Roberts replied, "I don't, I think it's too important." Similarly, Ms. Jennings answered, "I feel that reading is not fulfilled if you don't do the in-depth groups. . . . Just wide reading is not enough." Ms. Scott stated, "My groups, I enjoy them. . . . It's a lot of work." She and Ms. Roberts agreed that some teachers would not be willing to spend the time it takes to implement the groups.

The Participating Teachers' Recommendations for Other Teachers

The researcher asked the teachers to respond to the following question: "Do you have recommendations for other teachers interested in trying these kind of discussions?" Ms. Scott answered that discussion groups should be kept small, boys and girls should be mixed together, and teachers should know their students as readers. She also stated, "make sure your classroom is responsible enough that they can carry on while you're carrying on with the group." When Ms. Scott mentioned that both genders should be in a group, Ms. Jennings asserted, "Now there are times when I would have all girls; we did an Anne study one
year, *Anne of Green Gables,* and they had a tea." Although Ms. Roberts did not comment on the gender issue in this discussion, she also assembled same-gender literature study groups. Ms. Scott asserted later in the meeting that teachers should also be familiar with the book used in a discussion group, reading it every night (i.e., along with the students). The other two teacher concurred; furthermore, they expressed agreement with most of Ms. Scott's recommendations except for the desired gender make-up of the groups.

Ms. Jennings also recommended that students "have an experience on a theme, where they read different books around a theme." In an earlier individual interview Ms. Jennings had noted that she sometimes has students in an in-depth group each read a different book on a common theme. Additionally, all of the teachers mentioned doing follow-up activities with books students read in their literature discussion groups (e.g., making foods related to the stories, having an *Anne of Green Gables* tea). In conclusion, the participating teachers had specific recommendations for other teachers interested in implementing literature discussion groups; these recommendations dealt with group size and make-up, teacher preparation for the groups, and related possible outgrowths of the discussions (i.e., follow-up activities/projects).

As well as soliciting the teachers' perspectives on literature discussion groups, the researcher met with the participating students in each focal group to ask them about their thoughts on the observed discussions. The students' perspectives are presented in the next section.
The Students' Perspectives

One individual interview was conducted with each participating child near the end of his/her group's series of discussions. Additionally, a student-only group interview was done with each focal group shortly after all of its discussions were concluded. Appendix C contains the lists of questions asked in the individual and group student interviews. Many of the students' comments about the focal group sessions matched their teachers' perspectives and triangulated patterns in student and teacher discussion talk noted by the researcher. The views of the students in each teacher's group are summarized below.

Ms. Roberts' Students

The 5 fourth grade students (all girls) who participated in the Anastasia Krupnik group discussions all reported in the individual interviews that they liked the literature study group (and/or the book). Michelle said, "You get to find out what other people like about it [i.e., the book]. And that some people have different things than other people. . . . different ideas." According to Stacy, "I like to talk a lot, and it's fun to hear what other people have to say." Kelly asserted, "I really think that it's [i.e., a literature study group] something almost every kid should get a chance to do. . . . it helps you read . . . and helps you be like in a group, can work in a group and maybe get more friends." Kelly also said she liked doing "studies" (i.e., projects) with the book. There was something that Kelly did not like about the group, however. She stated,
"I don't like just doing it once a day. I would like us to read more chapters than we do."

The researcher asked the children in the individual and group interviews to describe what happened and what was talked about in the literature study discussions. The students said that they talked about Anastasia, her family, her "attitude," "things that we like [about the book]" (Stacy), and activities/projects to do with the book. Tina stated, "you have to talk to your teacher and tell her what the book's about that you're reading." Similarly, Ashley said, "You read a book, discuss like questions that the teacher asks." According to Kelly, "we talk about the book and we just read the chapters and raise our hands about it. And what we think about it." In terms of her own role in the discussions, Michelle asserted, "I listen and I like take some answers . . . and try to make 'um exciting for the other people so they don't get bored."

The students were asked in the group interview to tell who they thought talked the most during the discussions, including themselves and the teacher. Most agreed that it was Kelly. When asked who they thought talked the least, the students all agreed that it was another one of their peers. Thus, the children did not seem to view Ms. Roberts as the most talkative member of their group.

When asked in the individual and group interviews to describe what Ms. Roberts did and talked about during the group discussions, the students gave several responses: "She helps us read [orally]" (Stacy); "she tells us what's to explain about the book" (Tina); "She's like listening, seeing what you're saying about the book maybe" (Ashley); "she helps us
a lot because she says 'yeah,' and she talks with us back and forth -- that way it makes us comfortable, and we also talk back and forth and sometimes she makes us laugh too" (Kelly); and "She asked all the questions, and she helps us a lot, like gives us advice and stuff [i.e., about the book]" (Michelle). In the group interview the children also said that Ms. Roberts made utterances like "ohhh," and "umm, okay." The researcher asked the students to explain why they thought Ms. Roberts made such remarks. Kelly replied, "Because it was interesting, she thought it was interesting what we were [saying]."

In the individual interviews the children also gave the researcher their perspectives on Ms. Roberts' reasons for doing literature study groups with students. Stacy said, "Well, part of the reason I think is because people have trouble reading, or they like reading a lot, so she wants them to get in a group to read." Michelle thought that perhaps Ms. Roberts did the groups "to make you want to read more about that author, or stuff like that." She told the researcher that she was reading another book by Lois Lowry. In addition, Ashley and Tina thought that Ms. Roberts put students in literature study groups to help them get better at reading. Kelly believed that the groups were intended to help students "read more" and to enable them to talk about what they read.

In the individual interviews the students also expressed what they thought they were learning by participating in the literature study group. Stacy said, "I'm thinking of things in the book that I'm learning about. Like, um, I used to not feel sorry for them, but now I feel sorry for people in a retirement home." Tina felt that she and her peers were
learning new words in the book and learning to read better. She also mentioned, in reference to the researcher's presence, that she and her peers were learning "to read better on a tape recorder." Other children noted that they were learning the following: "books can be fun" (Michelle); "how to get along very well [i.e. with others in the group]" (Ashley); and "to read out loud" (Kelly). Kelly also said that she was learning "about Anastasia, and the way she acts could help me maybe later on in my years -- and maybe even now, never know." The researcher asked Kelly to elaborate, and she answered, "if I see what happens to her [Anastasia], I won't be that way so I can have more friends." Finally, Kelly asserted in the group interview, "I've learned to talk to other people about a book or share what I feel about a book, and I don't usually do that about a book."

In conclusion, many of the children's stated views matched Ms. Roberts' goals for and perspectives on the group as well as patterns in the discussions noted by the researcher. The participating students showed a positive response to the literature study discussions. They reported enjoying talking with others in a group, sharing responses and hearing what others had to say. They saw Ms. Roberts as a helper, listener, informer, and questioner in the group. They even alluded to Ms. Roberts' use of conversation maintenance signals by noting that she said "yeah," "ohhh," and "umm, okay" during the discussions. Finally, from the students' perspectives, they gained knowledge about elements of the human condition from the story, improved their reading abilities,
and learned new words, social skills, and the fact that books can be fun through their participation in a literature study group.

**Ms. Scott's Students**

The 6 fourth grade students (4 boys and 2 girls) who participated in the *Ida Early* group discussions all reported in the individual interviews that they enjoyed the literature study group (and/or the book) or thought it was "pretty good." Mike stated, "you get to read different kinds of books." Kevin noted, "A lot of the people [in the group] have good ideas," and Mary said, "everybody is nice." Rick, who had been in in-depth groups in Ms. Scott's room the previous year, asserted that he thought third graders should be included in the next group. When asked to elaborate, he explained: "Because it gives them a chance to learn to read maybe a little bit better if they're having trouble reading. It would give them a chance to maybe be with an older buddy that would be able to help them with the reading."

In the individual and group interviews the researcher asked the children to describe what happened and what was talked about in the in-depth discussions. (One student, Kevin, was not present for the group interview). The students stated that they talked about the following: what happened in the chapters they read at home, language (i.e., characters' dialect), *Ida's* tall tales and trickery, and their written assignments. Rick also noted that "we students sometimes talk over each other and interrupt." Mary said, "You're talking about everything that you found and you're telling everybody and like, you're finding everything and you're hearing what everybody else finds." In terms of
his own role in the discussions, Mike also asserted, "I listen to other people's comments."

The students were asked in the group interview to tell who they thought talked the most during the discussions, including themselves and the teacher. Most agreed that it was Eric. When asked who they thought talked the least, the children all agreed that it was another one of their peers. Thus, the students apparently did not view Ms. Scott as the most talkative member of their group.

When asked in the individual and group interviews to explain what Ms. Scott did and talked about during the group discussions, most of the children mentioned that she asked questions. Eric explained, "She listens to us and she says what page to go to, and she reads, and she asks us questions about what they did in the book and stuff like that." Similarly, Kevin said, "Well she finds stuff and talks about it, and she goes to parts and she asks us what happened." Rick described Ms. Scott's role as follows:

She's the lion tamer and we're the lions, because we're always like, in a cage they're always running over each other, and we're talking over each other, and so she tries to hold the peace. So, I mean, if she wasn't there, and you [the researcher] weren't there, then it wouldn't be any point, 'cause everyone would be talking over each other . . . because we're like messengers bringing stuff back from the book to show what we found.

Thus, Rick viewed Ms. Scott as a necessary manager of the discussions. Furthermore, he alluded to the notion of efferent reading (Rosenblatt,
by indicating that the students carried information away from the book to show others in the group meetings. Eric and Rick also noted in the group interview that Ms. Scott had already read the book, "and [she] knows more about it than we do" (Rick). Thus, they appeared to see Ms. Scott as the expert in the group.

In the individual interviews the students also shared their perspectives on Ms. Scott’s reasons for doing in-depth groups with students. Trisha tentatively said that the teacher’s reason was "to make sure that we've read the book or something." Several of the children thought that Ms. Scott did the groups to help them get better at reading or read more books, to help them learn to enjoy reading, and/or to see how well they were reading. Rick also stated that putting students in in-depth groups "gives people a chance to meet other people... and learn how to be able to work in a small group with other people and still not argue." Similarly, Mike believed that Ms. Scott "might want us to get a little better at groups."

The children explained in the individual interviews what they thought they were learning by participating in the in-depth group. Kevin thought he was learning to understand the book a little better. Mary said she was learning that "you should share everything, like be nice and stuff," and Rick stated that the group members were learning to work together. Trisha, one of the students who was new to Ms. Scott’s classroom the year of the study, said she did not really know what she was learning. Mike noted, "I'm learning that other books can be good... and when you get into book groups, it's just like getting into a brand
new book that you've never seen before." In the group interview the children also stated that by participating in the group they learned the following: "It's okay to like to read" (Eric); "It's okay to be different like Ida, and have different thoughts, and well, about the 1930's, the Depression" (Rick); and "We learned about Ida Early, and how the author writes" (Mike).

In summary, many of the students' stated views paralleled Ms. Scott's goals for and perspectives on the group as well as patterns in the discussions noted by the researcher. The focal children reported that they talked about the story and what they found in the story (e.g., the written assignment to note characters' dialect, tall tales, and/or trickery) and that they listened to the comments of others in the group. They viewed Ms. Scott as a questioner, listener, and procedural manager in the group. Finally, from the students' perspectives, they learned about the main character in the story, the Depression, and the author's writing style through their participation in the in-depth group. Children also reported learning to work with others in a group and finding out that "other books can be good" (Mike) and that "it's okay to like to read" (Eric).

Ms. Jennings' Students

Most of the 7 fifth grade students (4 boys and 3 girls) who took part in the Incident at Hawk's Hill discussions expressed a positive response to the in-depth group (and/or to the book). (The student who withdrew from the group during the course of the in-depth discussions agreed to an individual interview, but he chose not to participate in the group interview.) Steve stated, "it's different than just reading by
yourself, and, if you don't know what parts mean, then when you talk in the group, you're gonna ask questions so you can know what that means." From John's perspective, the group was "fun, because you got to tell about the book out loud instead of like in your mind, by yourself." Similarly, Nicole enjoyed being in the group "'cause you go a lot deeper in the book than you would if you were just reading it [by yourself]."

Diane said she liked to read in an in-depth group "because it's hard to choose out some books sometimes, and like, it's fun to be reading a book with somebody and to talk about it." According to Fred, the group was good for helping students learn to "perfect their reading skills."

In addition, Tony asserted that the group "was good in ways, but we should have been able to pick out our own book that we wanted to read." He also said, "sometimes you might want to be able to like form your own groups." Furthermore, Tony stated, "finding out what the words mean was pretty good, so we could understand it better. And then really discussing it so, you can argue and find out if you had the right idea."

Anne said she liked the group and the fact that two of her good friends were in it too; however, she asserted, "but I think some people could have um, talked a little less . . . I don't think we should have gotten in so many fights, 'cause some of them were meaningless."

The researcher asked the students in the individual and group interviews to describe what happened and what was talked about in the in-depth discussions. Statements made by Anne and Tony summed up what others in the group said. According to Anne,
Well, we would find out words we didn't understand, and talk about what happened in the book. And we kinda had our own opinions, and there were a couple [of] arguments about different things, and we had to prove other people wrong or show 'um what was really true, 'cause sometimes they don't understand the book.

Similarly, Tony stated, "You read a book, like a little bit at a time, then you come in and you talk about it, and begin to understand the book a little better, 'cause if it's a hard book, then you might be able to understand it so that you can get it read." Finally, Diane elaborated on the nature of the talk in the discussions from her point of view: "we talk about what happened over like the couple of pages or a chapter, and how we felt and how the people in the book felt, and the characters. And how the things happened, and what your opinion was."

In the group interview the children were asked to tell who they thought talked the most during the discussions, including themselves and the teacher. They named Diane as the most loquacious speaker. When asked who they thought talked the least, the students named a few of their peers (all boys). Thus, the students did not seem to view Ms. Jennings as the most verbal member of the group.

When asked in the individual and group interviews to describe what Ms. Jennings did and talked about during the group discussions, several of the students stated that she asked questions when the group got "off track" or "stuck," if no one else had anything to say, or "when we pretty much mention everything" (Diane). Diane and Nicole mentioned that Ms. Jennings listened as well. John stated, "we don't talk to her, but
just to the group." Similarly, Tony asserted, "we mostly do it by ourselves." In addition, Anne stated, "She is trying to stay out of the discussion as much as she can, but if she thinks that something is really, really important, then she'll say something and ask us questions. But I think she had a little bit of a problem of people talking to her, not to the group." The researcher speculates that Anne may have thought Ms. Jennings had "a little bit of a problem" because oftentimes during the discussions when a student looked at Ms. Jennings when speaking, she would tell that student to talk to his/her peers rather than to the teacher.

In the individual interviews the students also gave the researcher their perspectives on Ms. Jennings' reasons for doing in-depth groups with students. Several of the children thought that their teacher did in-depth groups to help people learn how to read better. Tony mentioned vocabulary building as another reason, and Steve said, "it's funer [sic] than just reading by yourself." John thought that Ms. Jennings did in-depth groups "probably to help us learn to talk out loud better maybe." Finally, Anne asserted, "I kinda think she does it so we can understand books better and learn how to talk to people about what we feel about the book. But I don't understand how she picks the groups." Thus, Anne was unclear on Ms. Jennings' reasons for placing particular students together in a group.

The children explained in the individual interviews what they thought they were learning by participating in the in-depth group. John said, "we're learning how to talk about a book out loud." Similarly, Steve
stated, "if you do it over and over, many times, then you can um, get better at participating with other people in things like this." Anne and Steve said that they learned new words as well. Tony candidly reported, "I learned that I don't like this author." He is the student who had made the suggestion that group participants be allowed to choose the books they read for in-depth discussions. Nicole asserted that she learned "pretty much how to really go in-depth into a book, and how to talk freely about what you've read." The researcher asked Nicole to explain what "in-depth" meant to her. Nicole responded, "That you go, like normally you just read the words and you don't really think about what's happening, so you go really in-depth, and you really think about everything that you read." Nicole also reported in the group interview that when she read a part of the story that she did not understand, a fellow group member would help her understand that part during an in-depth discussion.

In conclusion, many of the students' stated perspectives matched Ms. Jennings' goals for and views on the group as well as patterns in the discussions noted by the researcher. Participating children reported that they enjoyed reading and talking about a book with others, that they shared their opinions and got into arguments with each other (sometimes to excess from Anne's perspective), and that they learned new vocabulary words. Students also asserted that they improved their reading and verbal abilities by participating in the group. Finally, they seemed to perceive Ms. Jennings as on the periphery of the group, typically entering into the discussions only to ask questions when talk
had stalled or when she thought there was a particularly important point that needed to be made.

Summary

In this chapter the findings of the study were presented. The researcher discussed patterns in teacher strategies and student talk during the observed literature discussions for each teacher. Comparisons across the three cases were made. The relationships between the teachers' stated perspectives and their observed practices were also explored. In addition, the participating students' stated viewpoints on the literature groups were summarized.

Key findings of the research include the following:

• Generally speaking, for all three groups the small group discussions were contexts in which students shared and constructed literary understandings of the chapter books they read. Even though each group's discussions were unique, students across all three groups discussed literary elements, expressed their personal responses to and opinions of the stories, and made connections between the stories and their prior knowledge and/or personal experiences.

• Describing was a common form of meaning construction for all three groups. Students in each group often made inferences as well. In addition, in each group students made utterances at the levels of generalizing, evaluating, perspective-taking, and reflecting. Thus, student participants engaged in meaning construction that included, but also surpassed simple description.
• In each group students made a larger percentage of the coded discussion utterances than did their teacher. Furthermore, in all three groups students used conversation maintenance signals to show their engagement with fellow group members and to sustain the discussions. When the three groups were compared, it appeared that the less a teacher talked during the discussions, the more the students used conversation maintenance signals.

• Each teacher had her own unique style of interacting with students. For example, Ms. Roberts took responsibility for orchestrating much of the turn-taking in her group by nominating speakers whose hands were raised. She supported the children's assertions about Anastasia Krupnik by elaborating on, justifying, and/or positively evaluating their comments. She used substantive content questions sparingly. She often modeled and invited personal utterances related to the story. In addition, she sanctioned student talk about book-related projects to do upon completion of the story.

• Ms. Scott typically guided students through a sequential discussion of the chapters read in Ida Early Comes Over the Mountain for each session. She encouraged the children to discuss unfamiliar language in the story (e.g., the characters' regional dialect), to consider characters' feelings and actions, and to note patterns in the text, building meaning as story events unfolded. Furthermore, she used substantive content questions to check students' understandings of the story and to invite them to share their personal opinions.
Ms. Jennings explicitly talked about discussion processes and procedures with students, and she overtly encouraged student-student talk during group sessions. She urged the children to make decisions about group rules and reading assignments and to discuss *Incident at Hawk's Hill* amongst themselves. In addition, she interjected substantive content questions and statements during the discussions to prompt students to clarify or elaborate on their assertions and to explore facets of the story that they had not considered on their own.

Each teacher invited personal utterances during the discussions. All of the teachers shared prior knowledge related to the stories. Both Ms. Roberts and Ms. Scott also shared their own personal responses to the stories during the discussions. In particular, Ms. Roberts tended to make personal experience connections, and Ms. Scott tended to offer her personal interpretations of the text. Conversely, Ms. Jennings seldom related personal narratives or expressed her own interpretations of the story.

In general, for all three teachers their stated perspectives appeared to closely match their observed practices regarding literature discussion groups. For example, many of the teachers' stated goals for student talk and learning in literature groups correlated with observed student behaviors during the focal group sessions.

In interviews with the researcher, almost all of the students showed a positive response to the literature discussion groups in which they participated.
In all three groups, many of the students' interview comments about the focal group discussions matched their teachers' perspectives on literature groups and triangulated patterns in student and teacher talk noted by the researcher.

In the final chapter, the researcher discusses and interprets the findings of the study. The observed literature discussions are examined in light of previous research and theories related to the use of literature discussion groups in elementary classrooms, and suggestions for further research on the topic are submitted.
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to explore three elementary teachers' practices and perspectives, as well as their students' responses and views, regarding a particular component of literature-based language arts programs, literature discussion groups. Literature-based teaching approaches, including the use of small group discussions of literature, are gaining widespread popularity in elementary schools across the country. However, relatively few studies are available that reveal how teachers actually view and carry out these approaches in their naturally-occurring classroom environments.

In this study a small group of fourth or fifth grade students in each of three teachers' classrooms was followed as teacher and students read and discussed one realistic fiction novel from beginning to end. Two of the participating teachers, Ms. Scott and Ms. Jennings, taught at a suburban alternative school with a literature-based curriculum. The third teacher, Ms. Roberts, taught at a rural school where teachers were beginning the process of replacing traditional teaching methods with whole language approaches. The socioeconomic status of students in each school was middle or upper middle class, and the school
populations (grades K-5) were predominantly Caucasian. Ms. Scott and Ms. Roberts taught grade 3/4 combination classes, and Ms. Jennings taught a grade 5 class. All three teachers reported conducting small group discussions of literature in years prior to the year of the study.

Each focal group was comprised of 5 or 6 students. Teachers were asked to agree on a genre of literature to use in the discussions; they then individually chose the particular book read by each focal group. Additionally, the teachers selected the student participants and indicated that they were average or above average readers. All students participating in the study were fourth or fifth graders. Each group participated in seven to nine discussions over a two to five week period.

The researcher, in the role of observer as participant, audiotaped the discussions and took observational field notes on the proceedings. In addition, individual and group interviews with the teachers and participating students revealed information about their perspectives on the purposes and functions of literature discussion groups. Three or four preliminary visits to each teacher's classroom gave the researcher an opportunity to gather information about the environments in which the focal discussions were to take place. During these visits language arts-related activities and uses of literature in the classrooms were given special attention, and observational field notes were recorded. The primary data collection period spanned approximately five months, but all focal group discussions took place within a nine week time frame.

The conceptual framework for this study consisted of a social constructivist view of teaching and learning. Furthermore, the principles
of analytic induction guided analysis of the data corpus. The researcher used a category system to characterize the nature of teacher and student talk in the focal group discussions. Codes to describe the content of the talk, the kind of meaning construction involved in participants' utterances, and the function of participants' utterances were developed. Full transcripts of three selected discussions (the first, middle, and last) from each of the teacher's groups supplied data for in-depth analysis using the category system. Teacher discussion strategies, patterns in students' talk, and the quantity of teacher and student talk were noted.

Additionally, the researcher examined relationships between the teachers' observed practices and stated perspectives concerning literature discussion groups. Students' views on the literature groups were also explored in light of the observed discussions and the teachers' perspectives. Comparisons across the three cases highlighted similarities and differences in the teachers' discussion group practices.

In the remainder of this chapter key findings of the study are discussed. Implications of the research for classroom practice are also presented. In addition, the chapter includes suggestions for further research related to the use of literature discussion groups in elementary school settings.

Discussion of Findings

This section contains discussion and interpretation of key findings of the study. Salient features of the teachers' practices and perspectives regarding literature discussion groups are emphasized. The four
overarching themes that emerged from the study are discussed, along with connections between the themes and existing theories and research related to talk about literature in school.

Themes

Theme 1: The Teachers Adopted Nondominant Roles in the Discussions

In general, the three teachers' observed discussions did not reflect traditional question-answer recitation patterns of classroom talk, including talk about literature. The participating teachers invited, supported, and built upon students' literary understandings, showing a reciprocity that is often missing in teaching guided by a transmission view (Barnes, 1976; Wells, 1986). They thus responded to and were influenced by their students' behaviors during the literature discussions. Like teachers involved in several other studies of small group discussions of literature in elementary settings, the teachers in this study used facilitative rather than dominant means of interacting with student participants (e.g., Anzul, 1988, 1993; Crawford & Hoopingarner, 1993; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Paille, 1991).

Ms. Jennings' style of interacting with the fifth grade discussion group members was perhaps the most distinguishable departure from the more typical teacher-dominated mode of classroom discourse. She regularly responded to students who looked at her when speaking or who raised their hands in her direction by telling them to talk to their peers. At times she also set herself somewhat apart from the group physically. Her explicit and persistent admonitions for students to talk to one another rather than to her encouraged peer-peer interactions in
the *Incident at Hawk's Hill* group. Indeed, students at times talked for sizable stretches (i.e., many turns) of discussion sessions with little teacher input. Furthermore, Ms. Jennings enabled students to take part in decision-making processes by prompting them to decide on group rules and on the nightly reading assignments for the discussions. Additionally, rather than requiring students to follow her own personal interpretations of the story, the teacher tended to invite and respond to the students' literary experiences and interpretations. Thus, while she interjected questions and comments during group sessions and used conversation maintenance signals to mediate procedural aspects of the discussions, she clearly enabled students to express and explore their own interpretations.

Ms. Roberts' interactional style also departed from the question-answer recitation pattern. She asked substantive content questions only sparingly during the *Anastasia Krupnik* group discussions. She encouraged the fourth grade participants to make connections between elements in the story and their personal experiences and prior knowledge. She modeled such personal connections herself. Furthermore, Ms. Roberts was receptive to the students' comments and to their desire to contribute to the discussions. Specifically, she made statements which acknowledged, supported, elaborated on, and/or positively evaluated the children's assertions. She also nominated speakers in response to students' raised hands, giving them the floor to express their thoughts. Teacher and students co-constructed the context in which Ms. Roberts orchestrated much of the turn-taking. That is, Ms.
Roberts did not tell the children to raise their hands during group meetings, but they often did so, and the teacher responded to and reinforced this action by nominating the hand raisers to speak. Ms. Roberts also sanctioned talk about possible projects to do upon completion of the book. Students exhibited a sustained interest in brainstorming book-related project ideas, and the teacher showed a willingness to allow students to pursue this topic during several of the group meetings.

Like the other two teachers, Ms. Scott’s means of interacting with the *Ida Early Comes Over the Mountain* fourth grade group was not synonymous with the recitation pattern; however, Ms. Scott clearly took a more directive approach than did Ms. Roberts or Ms. Jennings. She asked questions and referred students to specific page numbers in the book to guide the group through sequential discussions of the assigned readings. Yet, within the framework maintained by Ms. Scott, students shared and explored their thoughts on the story. The teacher invited and modeled personal responses to and opinions of elements in the text. She also sanctioned talk that connected prior knowledge to the story. As did students in the other two groups, students in Ms. Scott’s group showed their engagement with fellow group members through the use of conversation maintenance signals. They were not just individually performing answers for their teacher -- as is typically the case in recitation-type discussions (Barnes, 1976).

In all three groups, students used conversation maintenance signals to acknowledge, agree with, or disagree with the remarks of other
group members. Children listened to, responded to, and built upon the comments of their peers, showing signs of exploratory speech (Barnes, 1976; Barnes & Todd, 1977). Furthermore, interruptions and overlapping talk among students occurred in each group. These characteristics of student talk provide further evidence of the teachers' nondominant stances during the discussions. In other words, the teachers did not exert such control over the talk that students were prevented from interacting in a conversational rather than a recitation manner.

Theme 2: Several Discussion Strategies Used by the Teachers Appeared to Foster Students' Literary Understandings

The three teachers used a number of discussion strategies that seemed to encourage students to articulate and explore their literary understandings. These strategies, like the teachers' nondominant discussion stances, reflected reciprocity and a collaborative interplay between teachers and students. Key strategies that the teachers had in common, as well as strategies that were unique to individual teachers, are discussed in this section.

All three teachers accepted and invited personal utterances during the discussions. They used questions or statements to help students make connections between their prior knowledge or personal experiences and elements in the books. For example, Ms. Roberts modeled connections she was making between aspects of Anastasia Krupnik and her own previous knowledge or experiences, thus demonstrating that such connections were a legitimate topic of discussion. Ms. Scott invited group members to interpret the characters'
mountain expressions in *Ida Early* and to discuss how they would phrase what the characters said. In the first discussion with her group, Ms. Jennings encouraged students to draw on their background knowledge by asking them to make predictions about *Incident at Hawk's Hill* based on the book cover only. Thus, the teachers helped students to see relationships between elements in the texts they were reading and their previous understandings (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) or everyday "action knowledge" (Barnes, 1976).

Elementary teachers in related studies also sanctioned personal utterances, recognizing the importance of such responses in the literary meaning making process (Anzul, 1988, 1993; Crawford & Hoopingarner, 1993; Eeds & Wells, 1989; O'Flahavan, Stein, Wiencek, & Marks, 1992; Paille, 1991). Thus, the findings of this study are consistent with observations of other researchers studying teacher-led small group discussions of literature. With regard to their observations of students sharing personal stories during literary discussions, Eeds and Wells (1989) concluded, "being able to talk about the text in oblique and personal ways seemed to help students develop the personal significance the text had for them" (p. 18). Anzul (1993) writes of linking text to life: "because of these connections, readers may be able to turn from the literary experience to other life experiences with broader understanding and increased sensitivity" (p. 195).

The three teachers in this study also encouraged students to share their personal interpretations of and responses to the stories. For example, each teacher included in her interactional repertoire questions
that signaled an invitation for personal opinion rather than an expectation for a single correct answer. As Urzua (1992) points out, a teacher question phrased "Why do you think he [Randall] suspected that Ida was gone?" (S8, p. 4) sends a different message than does a question worded "Why did Randall suspect that Ida was gone?". Both types of questions demonstrate attitudes about teaching and learning (Urzua, 1992). In the observed discussions all three teachers asked questions which invited personal responses and opinions, questions worded "What did you think about...?"; "Why do you think...?"; or "Do you think...?".

Each teacher also used techniques which seemed to scaffold their students' literary meaning making (Applebee & Langer, 1983; Bruner, 1985, 1986). For example, Ms. Roberts used modeling to demonstrate building on previous knowledge or experiences to make sense of aspects of a story. Her students in turn talked about personal experiences and knowledge related to Anastasia Krupnik. Ms. Roberts also justified, elaborated on, or positively evaluated students' assertions in an effort to encourage the children to consider the plausibility of various viewpoints. Given that the students were fairly new to literature-based activities (their school was in transition from a traditional, basal-based curriculum to whole language), Ms. Roberts' desire to help students feel successful when articulating their literary understandings makes sense. Indeed, the supportive discussion environment appeared to draw out students whom the teacher described as shy or unlikely to volunteer to talk during whole class discussions. In addition, Ms. Roberts provided
procedural support for the discussions by orchestrating turn-taking in response to the students' use of hand-raising.

Ms. Scott's scaffolding included providing the overarching framework for the group discussions. She asked questions and referred students to specific pages in the story to guide their literary conversations. Her close focus on the assigned readings appeared to reflect in part her stated concerns about the comprehension abilities of some of the students in the group. Additionally, three of the group members were new to Ms. Scott's classroom; Ms. Scott indicated that children inexperienced with participating in discussions of chapter books need teacher support to be able to talk about the stories "in-depth." Thus, Ms. Scott tailored what she did during the discussions according to her perceptions of the students' needs and abilities. Furthermore, Ms. Scott modeled her own personal responses to and interpretations of *Ida Early*. She also encouraged students to note patterns in unfolding story events, patterns they may not have noted on their own. Within the discussion structure created by Ms. Scott, the children expressed and explored their understandings of the story.

Ms. Jennings enabled her students to construct their literary understandings with minimal to moderate teacher input during the group discussions. In the first group meeting she explained her expectations for in-depth discussions, which included bringing out details in the story, engaging in arguments, and returning to the book to "prove" an interpretation. Her expectations were realized in the *Incident at Hawk's Hill* discussions. Ms. Jennings' request that students decide on
discussion rules and reading assignments further moved the children toward self-directed learning. In addition, throughout the discussions the teacher explicitly and consistently expressed a desire for the students to talk amongst themselves rather than just to her. In a sense Ms. Jennings was revealing the "hidden curriculum" through her overt talk about discussion expectations, processes, and procedures (Barnes, 1976; Cazden, 1988).

Like Ms. Jennings, Anzul (1988, 1993), a teacher-researcher, reported that she explicitly encouraged student-student talk during literature group discussions with fifth and sixth grade students. Anzul argued that this encouragement was necessary to foster discussions in which responses would be openly and spontaneously expressed. She found that as students gained more experience with literature group discussions, they showed the ability to reach higher levels of thinking and to extend their literary insights without teacher intervention. The findings of both Anzul's research and the study reported here suggest that explicit encouragement of student-student interaction is a teacher strategy that can enhance students' literary understandings during small group discussions of literature.

Ms. Jennings also scaffolded the observed discussions by using questions and statements to prompt students to move beyond simple retelling and to consider facets of the story that they had not addressed on their own. She urged students to go back to the book to "prove" their descriptions and interpretations of story events, signaling that some interpretations are more supported by elements in a text than are others
(Rosenblatt, 1978, 1985). Additionally, she sometimes summarized, clarified, or requested elaboration on student assertions. Her interjections often appeared to be intended to "lift" the students, to push them to deepen their literary understandings. These interjections may have been supporting the students so that they could work in their zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). It seems reasonable to suggest that by encouraging the children to talk to each other rather than to her, and thus by not "managing" the discussions, Ms. Jennings freed herself to attend to contributions that would stretch students. Overall, Ms. Jennings gave or withdrew support in response to what the students were doing during the discussions.

**Theme 3: The Teachers' Stated Perspectives on Literature Group Discussions Matched Their Observed Practices to a Large Extent**

The three teachers' reported views on the purposes and functions of literature discussion groups matched many of the discussion practices observed by the researcher. Overall, the teachers' descriptions of their own roles and the students' roles during group sessions were similar to observed behaviors in the focal discussions. Furthermore, the teachers' stated goals for student talk and learning in the literature groups paralleled many of the behaviors exhibited in the observed discussions.

In Ms. Roberts' group, students (a) discussed the main character in the story (*Anastasia Krupnik*) and events in her life, (b) made connections between elements in the story and their life experiences and prior knowledge, (c) mentioned the author's (Lois Lowry's) style of writing and speculated on her reasons for writing the book, and (d) periodically
talked about unfamiliar words in the story. They also evidenced enjoyment of literature; they showed an eagerness to participate in the discussions and a desire to brainstorm book-related project ideas to extend their engagement with the story. All of these observed student behaviors were in keeping with Ms. Roberts' stated goals for literature study groups. Specifically, Ms. Roberts had asserted that she wanted students to do the following in literature study groups: discuss story elements, see relationships between the text and life, become aware of the author's style, talk about new vocabulary, and enjoy literature.

In Ms. Scott's group, students (a) made inferences about characters' feelings and actions in *Ida Early*, (b) occasionally made generalizing and evaluating remarks related to the text, (c) considered a character's point of view, and (d) discussed the characters' regional dialect and unfamiliar words in the story. Additionally, most of the children actively participated in the discussions. They used conversation maintenance signals to respond to the comments of others, and they showed an enthusiasm for reading through their lively talk during group meetings. Students also periodically attended to the author's (Robert Burch's) techniques and style; Ms. Scott was typically the group member who broached the subject of the author. These observed student behaviors paralleled Ms. Scott's stated goals for in-depth groups. Ms. Scott had specifically articulated the following expectations for student talk and learning in in-depth groups: discuss a book critically, explore characters' feelings, talk about vocabulary or unusual language in a story, question
and comment on other students' remarks, be enthusiastic about reading, and examine an author's style of writing.

Students in Ms. Jennings' group made utterances at the inferring, generalizing, evaluating, perspective-taking, and reflecting levels. While they often engaged in story retelling, they also moved beyond simple description during the discussions. Students talked about the author's (Allan Eckert's) style of writing and choices, and they periodically discussed unusual or unfamiliar words in Incident at Hawk's Hill. Furthermore, the children voiced disagreements with fellow group members, and they debated the veracity of recalled story elements or literary interpretations. Finally, students collaborated with each other to determine the nightly reading assignments for the group. All of these observed student behaviors matched Ms. Jennings' stated goals for in-depth groups. Specifically, Ms. Jennings had indicated that she wanted students to do the following in in-depth groups: move beyond retelling; discuss an author's choices, devices, and style; talk about vocabulary words in a story; express disagreement with the interpretations of others; and make decisions about group reading assignments.

The findings of this study regarding the matches between the three teachers' stated perspectives and observed practices are somewhat surprising given the findings of related previous research. For example, in interviews with personnel from six elementary schools, Walmsley and Walp (1989) found that teachers' instructional philosophies toward literature use were sometimes at odds with literature-related activities they reported conducting with students. Often the teachers themselves
showed an awareness of the discrepancy. The researchers maintained that "many teachers are in the process of developing a stance toward the use of literature in their classrooms, and have yet to settle on a particular set of beliefs or practices" (p. 5).

It may be that the findings of this study are different from Walmsley and Walp's (1989) findings because Ms. Roberts, Ms. Scott, and Ms. Jennings had had time to integrate their literature discussion group perspectives and practices. All three teachers had implemented literature discussion groups in their classrooms in years prior to the year of the study. Ms. Jennings was clearly the most experienced in the use of literature discussion groups, having conducted them in her classroom for 11 years before the year of the study (compared to the 2 years and 3 years of prior experience reported by Ms. Roberts and Ms. Scott, respectively). Furthermore, Ms. Scott and Ms. Jennings had been using literature-based approaches to language arts instruction for many years; Ms. Roberts was in her third year of implementing whole language and literature-based teaching techniques. As was revealed in Chapter IV, Ms. Roberts had certainly not spent as much time teaching with literature-based approaches as had Ms. Scott and Ms. Jennings; however, she was in the process of expanding her repertoire of literature uses in the classroom, a process she had been working on for over two years.

Each teacher was also in a school environment that supported extensive use of literature in the classroom. The curriculum at Dover, the suburban school, was literature-based, and the principal at the rural school, Briarwood, was advocating teacher change to whole language and
literature-based instructional approaches. Furthermore, all three teachers had obtained or were in the process of obtaining advanced degrees (i.e., master's degrees in the field of education). It thus seems reasonable to suggest that substantive experiences with literature-based approaches, particularly in the cases of Ms. Scott and Ms. Jennings, building-level support for their practices, and pursuit of professional development were all factors that contributed to positive correlations between the three teachers' literature group practices and perspectives.

Another contributing factor to positive correlations found between the teachers' practices and perspectives may have been the similarity in discourse practices, socioeconomic status, and culture between each teacher and her students. Wollman-Bonilla (1991) found that when a sixth grade teacher engaged in literature group discussions with students whose discourse practices were different from the teacher's and who were mostly from working-class backgrounds, participants co-constructed a context in which the teacher controlled the talk and student-initiated meaning making was constrained. Conversely, when the same teacher conducted discussions with students who spoke Standard English and who were from middle-class backgrounds, the resultant context was one in which student comments were valued and participants engaged in collaborative meaning making. Wollman-Bonilla's findings are supported by related sociolinguistic research on classroom speech events and language patterns; this research indicates that teachers often misunderstand and/or undervalue the nonmainstream discourse styles of minority students (Cazden, 1988;
Heath, 1982a, 1983; Michaels, 1986). In the study reported here, the generally homogeneous nature of the groups in all three cases may have been a factor in enabling the teachers to accomplish matches between their stated perspectives and their actual practices.

The researcher in this study also acknowledges that her presence as an observer during the discussions may have influenced how the teachers conducted the literature groups. Articulating their goals to the researcher may have made the teachers more aware of their practices during the observed sessions. The fact remains, however, that the teachers demonstrated that they could realize their stated goals for student talk and learning in actual practice.

With regard to the participating students, it must be noted that some of their behaviors described in this section were student-initiated. That is, talk about various story-related topics and/or meaning construction utterances that surpassed simple description were not in all cases a direct result of teacher prompting or questioning. For example, students rather than the teacher brought up the author's style of writing in one of Ms. Roberts' group's discussions. Children in each group made connections between elements in the stories and their prior knowledge or experiences that did not stem directly from a teacher query to do so. In other cases, the teachers did initiate talk about particular topics, such as vocabulary words or unusual language in a story. Similarly, the teachers did ask questions or make statements which prompted students to interpret characters or story events, generalize about human nature, or make evaluative comments. The
point is that students and teachers collaborated to share and construct literary understandings and that the students had opportunities to express as well as to stretch their means of sense making.

**Theme 4: Many of the Students' Views on the Discussions Matched Their Teachers' Perspectives and Researcher-Observed Patterns of Talk**

Since the students were active participants in the social contexts for discussion constructed in the observed focal groups, their perspectives on the discussions provided the researcher with important insights. To a large extent the children appeared to perceive the purposes and functions of the literature discussions in much the same way as their teachers. Indeed, many of their stated views triangulated researcher-observed patterns in the discussions as well as teacher goals for and perspectives on the groups. These student views, as expressed in individual and group interviews with the researcher, are summarized and discussed in this section.

Students in Ms. Roberts' group showed a positive response to the literature study discussions. They said that they enjoyed talking with others in a group, sharing responses and hearing what others had to say. From their points of view they gained knowledge about elements of the human condition from the story and improved their reading abilities. They also reported learning new words, social skills, and the fact that books can be fun through their participation in a literature study group. Finally, the children saw Ms. Roberts as a helper, listener, informer, and questioner in the group. As Kelly stated of her teacher, "she helps us a lot because she says 'yeah,' and she talks with us back and forth -- that
way it makes us comfortable, and we also talk back and forth and sometimes she makes us laugh too.

Students in Ms. Scott's group viewed their teacher as a questioner, listener, and procedural manager during the discussions. They reported that they listened to the comments of others in the group and talked about the story and what they found in the story (e.g., the on-going written assignment to note characters' dialect, tall tales, and/or trickery). From the students' viewpoints, they learned about the main character in the story, the Depression, and the author's writing style. Children also reported that through their participation in the in-depth discussions they learned to work with others in a group, discovered that new books can be enjoyable, and found that "it's okay to like to read" (Eric).

Ms. Jennings' participating students stated that they enjoyed reading and talking about a book with others, that they shared their opinions and got into arguments with each other, and that they learned new vocabulary words. In addition, students asserted that they improved their reading and verbal abilities by participating in the discussions. Finally, the children appeared to view Ms. Jennings as a peripheral member of the group. They reported that she typically entered into the discussions only to ask questions when talk had stalled or when she thought there was a particularly important point that needed to be made. As Tony asserted, "we mostly do it by ourselves."

In summary, most of the participating students indicated that they viewed the focal discussion groups in a positive light. Children reported that they expanded their learnings, both literary and social, by
participating in the groups. In general, they seemed to understand what was expected of them during the discussions, and they were able to articulate their understandings. Students also appeared to see their teachers as supportive members (or supportive peripheral members in the case of Ms. Jennings) of the groups. Given the positive correlations between the three teachers' stated perspectives and observed practices, it does not seem surprising that the students' perceptions of the focal discussions were closely aligned with their teachers' views and the researchers' observations. The children's reported perspectives indicate that the teachers' words and actions clearly communicated the purposes and functions of the literature groups. Furthermore, as previously noted, the linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic similarities between the teacher and students in each group may have contributed to the matches between the teachers' and students' views on the observed discussions.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study supports the premise that literature discussion groups can be contexts in which students express, explore, and enrich their literary understandings. With an engaging literary text, a small social group, and the support of their teacher, the students in this study constructed meaning. Each teacher's approach to the discussions was unique, but each represented a departure from the typical recitation pattern of talk about literature in school. The teachers were responsive to the needs and abilities of their particular students, and they encouraged the children to make connections between the
texts they were reading and their prior knowledge and previous experiences. Implications of the study for classroom practice and future research are discussed in the next section.

Implications for Classroom Practice and Future Research

Several findings from this study have implications for classroom practice and further research. The study sheds light on current literature-based teaching practices, providing insights into how three teachers viewed and implemented small group discussions of literature in their classrooms. Two of the teachers (Ms. Scott and Ms. Jennings) had been using literature-based approaches for many years; the third teacher (Ms. Roberts) was in her third year of transition from traditional to whole language teaching methods. Ms. Roberts and Ms. Scott had been operating literature discussion groups in their classrooms for a few years prior to the study; Ms. Jennings had had 11 years of experience with in-depth groups before the research. Thus, all three teachers had implemented literature discussion groups in school years prior to the year of the study; yet, they represented a range of experiences with literature-based teaching approaches and with the use of literature discussion groups.

Generally speaking, the observed discussions in each of the three cases were contexts in which students shared and explored their understandings of the books they read. Consequently, findings from this study may be informative to other teachers interested in implementing literature discussion groups in their classrooms.
The findings include rich examples of a range of techniques teachers may consider using to interact supportively with students when talking about literary texts in the classroom. Specifically, observed teacher strategies (used by one or more of the participating teachers) that appeared to foster students' literary meaning making included the following: (a) modeling personal responses and connections; (b) encouraging students to see relationships between prior knowledge or experiences and elements in the stories; (c) asking questions that urged students to construct meaning at the levels of interpretation, generalization, or evaluation; (d) supporting the plausibility of students' assertions; (e) prompting students to consider the meaning of unusual language or unfamiliar words in the stories; (f) listening to students' contributions; (g) sanctioning argumentation about differing literary understandings; and (h) explicitly talking about discussion group expectations, processes, and procedures with students. In future studies, emphasis on particular strategies or a combination of strategies observed in this study would further illuminate potentially fruitful discussion group practices.

Each participating teacher had her own unique way of interacting with students, yet each was successful in meeting many of her stated goals for student talk and learning in the discussions. Differences in the teachers' styles suggest that there is more than one "right" way to conduct literature group discussions. Although the teachers had differing styles, they did have in common facilitative stances during the discussions, and they each showed reciprocity in their interactions with
students. Other studies of teacher-led small group discussions of literature in elementary school settings have similarly indicated that teachers who adopted collaborative rather than dominant roles during discussions fostered students' literary meaning making (Anzul, 1988, 1993; Crawford & Hoopingarner, 1993; Crouse, 1987; Eeds & Wells, 1989; O'Flahavan, Stein, Wiencek, & Marks, 1992; Paille, 1991).

This study thus contributes to a small but growing body of research on literature discussion groups in elementary settings. Most of the other studies of teacher-led literature discussion groups were undertaken by researchers collaborating with teachers, researchers intervening to implement particular strategies, or teachers-as-researchers. This study was conducted from the perspective of a researcher participating primarily as an observer in naturally-occurring classroom environments. It thus adds another dimension to the body of knowledge on the topic. It shows how teachers applied a literature-based technique in their own ways. Nevertheless, the findings of the study are consistent with much of the previous research on small group discussions of literature. Like many of the other studies on the topic, this study utilized a small number of participants. Referring to studies of response to literature, which also typically involve a limited number of subjects, Galda (1983) writes, "the power of these studies lies in the similarity of their findings" (p. 6). Galda's assertion is applicable to the research on literature discussion groups.

One of the few other studies of elementary literature groups undertaken from the perspective of a researcher as observer was done by
Wollman-Bonilla (1991). In her ethnographic research conducted in a sixth grade classroom, she found that differing discourse practices between teacher and students hindered collaborative dialogues during literature discussions. In a teacher-labeled low ability group, the teacher and students had conflicting discourse practices; the resultant literature discussions consisted of teacher-controlled talk and minimal student-initiated literary meaning making.

In the study reported here, teacher and student discourse practices in all three cases were fairly homogeneous; thus, difference in dialects was not a factor in the observed discussions. Students of culturally and linguistically different backgrounds may not talk about literature in ways that are readily understood or valued by Caucasian, mainstream teachers (Cazden, 1988; Heath, 1982a, 1983; Michaels, 1986). In addition, the student participants in this study were all described as average to above average readers by their teachers. It may be that similar teacher and student discourse practices and cultural backgrounds, combined with the average to above average ability levels of the children, were contributing factors in the three teachers' adoption of nondominant stances during the observed discussions. More studies of literature discussion groups composed of students whose discourse practices differ from those of their teacher and/or some fellow group members are needed to determine how and to what extent conflicting dialects influence the nature of literature group interactions.

Further research which examines literature group discussions involving low-achieving or at-risk elementary readers also seems
warranted. Such studies could identify teacher strategies particularly useful for fostering the literary understandings of less able readers. Furthermore, investigations of teacher-led discussion groups composed of students with various ethnic backgrounds or of students with disparate reading abilities (i.e., low- and high-ability) could reveal how peers as well as the teacher mediate literary meaning making in a small social context.

The teachers in this study indicated that how they conducted the discussions depended on the individual students involved and/or on the books being read. Ms. Scott and Ms. Jennings in particular maintained that the degree to which they participated in in-depth discussions was at least partially contingent upon the students' relative experience with in-depth groups. Future research endeavors might trace a teacher's work with a group or groups over time, noting how and to what extent teacher and student roles in literature discussions change during the course of a school year. Students' growth in understanding literature could also be revealed through studies that trace literature groups over time.

Similarly, further research on group discussions of different genres of literature seems warranted. Researchers, for example, Galda (1990), have suggested that students' responses to realistic fiction are different from their responses to fantasy; however, Galda's study did not focus on small group interactions as the contexts for response. How do teachers and peers interacting in small group contexts influence students' responses to different genres of literature? If the literary genre
being read is unfamiliar to students, how can teachers foster and support students' developing understandings in a small group situation?

In limited general classroom observations, the researcher noted apparent similarities between teacher discussion strategies during the literature group sessions and teacher patterns of talk during other classroom events (such as teacher read alouds); however, the focus of this study remained on the literature discussions themselves. A study by Smagorinsky and Fly (1993) at the secondary level suggests that teachers' discourse practices during whole class discussions of literature influence students' patterns of talk in small group discussions. A fruitful future research direction would be to look more closely at the possible relationships between elementary teachers' discourse practices during literature group discussions and their discourse practices during other classroom activities/lessons.

Ms. Roberts, Ms. Scott, and Ms. Jennings provided information in interviews about their reading programs and thus about the larger contexts for literature group discussions in their classrooms. For example, as explained in Chapter IV, Ms. Jennings indicated that literature groups afford her students an opportunity to read and think about a story more in-depth than they typically do when engaged in wide reading (i.e., independent reading of a book a week, as required by Ms. Jennings). Although teacher interviews revealed some information about the purposes of literature group discussions within the contexts of the teachers' reading programs, researcher observations focused primarily on the focal literature groups rather than on the full range of reading-
related activities that occurred in the teachers' classrooms. Additional research is needed to more fully investigate how elementary teachers who conduct literature group discussions perceive and implement those discussions within the contexts of their entire reading programs.

With regard to the status of elementary literature instruction, researchers have recently suggested that many elementary teachers view literature use primarily as a means of teaching basal-like reading skills (Walmsley, 1992; Walmsley & Walp, 1989). Walmsley (1992) calls for more well-defined and comprehensive uses of literature:

should we not read books to children partly to introduce them to new authors, to new topics, and to vocabulary and syntax beyond the children's current understanding? . . . Wouldn't it be appropriate to use literature to teach children something about literary techniques? . . . Should there not be some planning to insure that children are exposed to a variety of literary genres? (p. 510).

The study reported here indicates that some teachers have moved beyond the practice of using literature mainly to teach basal-like reading skills. Ms. Scott and Ms. Jennings had been teaching with literature-based approaches for many years, and their views on the role of literature in small group discussions, and in the curriculum in general, were quite similar to what Walmsley (1992) outlines. Ms. Roberts was in the process of replacing her traditional teaching methods with whole language approaches at the time of the study. She did mention the need during literature discussions to attend to comprehension-related skills
like those found in basal materials. Yet she conducted the observed discussions in a manner far removed from a typical basal reading lesson. Furthermore, like the other two teachers, Ms. Roberts stated that she wanted students to be exposed to quality literature, to read books they might not have chosen on their own, and to become aware of authors' writing styles. Thus, through the implementation of literature discussion groups (and other literature-related activities in their classrooms), the teachers in this study were using literature for many of the purposes suggested by Walmsley (1992).

This study contributes to mounting evidence that small group discussions of literature can be contexts for the enrichment of students' literary understandings. With a supportive teacher, a small social group, and an interesting text, elementary children can use talk to engage in productive literary meaning making. Elementary teachers need to consider including literature discussion groups in their instructional repertoires.

Researchers need to continue to seek out and illuminate successful, naturally-occurring literature-based teaching techniques and the circumstances of their use. Description and interpretation of the current practices and perspectives of successful teachers is needed to identify points of departure for the development and improvement of literature-based programs in elementary schools.
APPENDIX A

INTRODUCTORY TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE
Introductory Teacher Questionnaire

Instructions: Please fill in, check, or circle your responses.

1. Name (please include if you would consider becoming a participant in my dissertation research)

2. School and School District

3. Grade You Teach

4. Number of Years Teaching

5. I would characterize my school's reading program as:

   _____ Literature-based

   _____ Basal reader-based

   _____ Some classrooms in my building are literature-based, others are basal reader-based

   _____ Other (please explain)

6. I would characterize the reading program in my classroom as:

   _____ Literature-based

   _____ Basal reader-based

   _____ Other (please explain)

7. If small group discussions of literature/trade books are a part of your classroom reading program, please respond to the following questions. If you do not currently use small group discussions of literature in your classroom, please go to question 8.
a. I use small group discussions of literature in my classroom on a

   _____ Daily basis
   _____ Weekly basis
   _____ Monthly basis

b. I have been using small group discussions of literature in my classroom for

   _____ 1-2 years
   _____ 3-5 years
   _____ more than 5 years

c. Please give a brief explanation of your reasons for using small group discussions of literature in your classroom.

   ------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
   ------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
   ------------------------------------------------------------------------------------


d. Please give a brief description of your teaching strategies for small group discussions of literature.

   ------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
   ------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
   ------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

8. I do not currently use small group discussions of literature/trade books in my classroom reading program. My reasons are:

   ------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
   ------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
   ------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
   ------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
   ------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
   ------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
APPENDIX B

TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Sample Teacher Individual Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your reading program in general.
2. What influenced your decision to start using literature groups?
3. Tell me what you mean by "in-depth." [asked of Ms. Scott and Ms. Jennings]
4. Tell me about the "literature study." [asked of Ms. Roberts]
5. Tell me what you mean by "meaty" books. [asked of Ms. Scott]
6. Explain what you mean by "lifting" kids. [asked of Ms. Jennings]
7. What are your purposes for using literature groups?
8. What do you see as your role in the literature groups?
9. What do you see as the students' roles in the literature group discussions?
10. What were your reasons for choosing the particular book _________? [i.e., the book used with the focal group]
11. Tell me about the reading and general abilities of the students in the [focal] group.
12. How many years have you been teaching? What grades have you taught?
13. Have you always taught with an informal or a literature-based approach? [asked of Ms. Scott and Ms. Jennings]
14. What does "whole language" mean to you? [asked of Ms. Roberts]
15. What are your reflections on the [focal] discussions so far?
Closing Teacher Meeting Interview Questions

1. **What are your general reflections on the group discussions?** What worked, what didn't, and why?
2. **Are there things you feel strongly about maintaining concerning how you formatted the groups, or conducted the discussions?**
3. **Are there things you might change about the groups based on your experiences with the groups I observed?**
4. **Do you have recommendations for other teachers interested in trying these kind of discussions?**
5. **What do you see as the benefits of doings the groups for you and the students?**
6. **Do you see any drawbacks to doing these groups?**
7. **What do you see as differences between third and fourth graders, and then fourth and fifth graders, as far as [their characteristics as] readers?**
APPENDIX C

STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Individual Student Interview Questions

1. What do you think about the literature study/discussion group?
2. Is there anything in particular that you like about the literature study/discussion group? Tell me about it.
3. Is there anything in particular that you do not like about the literature study/discussion group? Tell me about it.
4. How would you describe your literature group discussions to someone who has never observed your group?
5. a) How would you describe what you do during the discussions to someone who has never observed your group?
   b) How would you describe what [teacher] does during the discussions to someone who has never observed your group?
6. Why do you think [teacher] has you and other students participate in literature group discussions?
7. What do you think you are learning by participating in the literature group discussions?
8. a) Do you like to read?
    b) Do you read at home?
    c) What do you read at home?
9. a) Do others in your family like to read?
    b) What do they read at home?
Focal Group Interview Questions

1. a) What did you, the students, talk about during the discussions?
b) What did [teacher] talk about?

2. a) Who did the most talking during your group discussions, including yourselves and [teacher]?
b) Who talked the least?
c) How did you decide when to say something during the discussions?

3. What do you think you learned by participating in the discussions?

4. Do you think the group discussions helped you understand the story? How/in what way?

5. Did any of the group discussions cause you to think about the story in a different way?

6. What was your favorite part of the group discussions?

7. Do you have any suggestions for [teacher] for ways to improve the literature discussion groups?

8. What advice would you give to a student who is going to participate in a literature discussion group for the first time (to help them get the most out of the discussions)?
APPENDIX D

SAMPLE FIELD NOTES
Sample Field Notes

Excerpts From:

Entry #10R [Roberts]
Date: 10-19-92, 10:30-11:35
Observations at Briarwood
Group R, Discussion #1 (Taped), 10:45-11:30

Dana told the class that 'I want to meet with the girls who are doing the group reading.' She told the class that she needed them to be quiet because she was going to do this. She then told the participating 4th grade girls to get chairs and go to the back of the room 'with Ms. Allen'.

Group Discussion #1 (Taped)

6. I slid my chair over nearer Dana's desk. The 5 girls were soon sitting in chairs around me, in a circle. I tried to move a little away from them, explaining that I was just going to listen. Kelly asked me what they were doing. I told her that I'd let Mrs. Roberts explain. I began to take out and set up my tape equipment. Michelle said something to the effect of, 'oh no, not that again,' in a coy manner. Kelly asked me if I still had "that note" (referring to the green post-it on the microphone) and told me to turn it on. I asked the girls how they were doing and smiled at them as we waited on Dana. They told me they were doing fine.

....

7. Dana soon came back to us. She asked the boy who was in the desk by hers if he could move so she could sit in his desk while she worked with the group. He agreed and left our area. Dana got the Anastasia books off her desk and they were passed around to the girls. She couldn't find one of the books (she had 5 copies instead of 6). She gave the girls the 5 copies and used a library edition of the book. As she looked for the 6th paperback copy, Kelly said to me, "Teacher gotta have one too..." Kelly, looking in her own Anastasia book, read and said, "Things she hates. She hates hospital rooms."

8. Dana sat down in the boy's desk. I told her that I had told the girls that I wanted to sit on the edge and just listen and not interfere with what they were doing. Dana said, "Oh, okay." I placed the tape equipment on the desk Dana was using and turned on the tape. It was around 10:45. Dana was sitting sideways in the desk, facing the chalkboard. Each of the girls was holding a paperback copy of Anastasia Krupnik in her hands (the books I had obtained).
Here is the "seating arrangement":

```
Tina  Stacy  Michelle
  X      X
Ashley X        Kelly
  X
Dana  X        Me
```

[Facsimile of notes recorded during the observed discussion:]

Dana: (had library version) list question.
Ashley: 'What kind of personality she has.'
Kelly: (raised hand)
Tina:
Dana: question.
Tina: 'Who she likes'
Dana: 'Have you ever made a list?'

. . . .
Dana: 'First page of story. Normally not round robin reading.' . . .
Kelly: read aloud first page and beginning of second.
Michelle: read aloud second page.
(Dana had to attend to other students -- their drawings. . .)
(The other girls followed along attentively. . .)
Dana quickly corrected hesitations, mispronunciations
Tina corrected too; Kelly helped. . .
Tina: read aloud fourth page.
Kelly asked me about "unique" - Dana looked back and answered.
When Tina read "I got a small pink wart" [p. 4], Michelle laughed, put her book to her face, looked at Stacy. Other girls giggled too.

......

[Sample Reflections on Group R, Discussion #1:]

O.C. Dana "set up" the story for the girls by drawing their attention to Anastasia's notebook list. She asked questions dealing with interpretation (e.g., "What do you think this [Anastasia's lists] might have to do with the story?"), prediction ("What do you think this is going to be about?"), relation to personal experience ("Have you ever made a list?"). Dana did not ask any questions during the girls' reading aloud of Chapter 1 -- she followed along and monitored the other students in the class.

It seems that to most of the girls' answers to her questions, Dana responded with "okay" or an evaluative comment (e.g., "Ooo, that's a good one, what kind of personality she might have"). Dana also shared her own personal experiences with the students (e.g., concerning list making). She seemed perfectly willing to let the girls share their experiences regarding lists, giving them time to tell their stories. After listening to them talk, Dana usually responded with "okay" and asked another question or called on another student.

During the reading aloud Dana was quick to jump in and pronounce a word if one of the girls hesitated or stumbled during their reading. Was this to move things along more quickly?

Dana was frequently interrupted by other students during the taping of this discussion. Students approached her to show her their drawings or to ask her a question. She monitored the classroom throughout the discussion, looking around the room and sometimes speaking to particularly noisy students. A couple of times Dana got up to go talk to a student or students; at one point she went to the board and wrote "5 minutes" on it, then circled it. During the vast majority of these interruptions the girls in the group continued reading.

I was amazed at how attentively the girls followed the reading aloud, even when it wasn't their turn to read. Throughout, they largely ignored the noise and activity around them. When I looked at each of them, they were almost always absorbed in the book, following along during the reading aloud by their fellow group members.

At the end of the group experience, Dana asked the girls to make their own lists of things they love and hate -- I think this is another example of her trying to relate the students' school experiences (including the reading of books) to their personal lives. She also talked about "vocabulary words" and had underlined certain words in Chapter 1 of one of the copies of the book (e.g., "unique," "astigmatism").
APPENDIX E

SAMPLE CODED DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT EXcerPTS
Sample Coded Discussion Transcript Excerpts

From the Incident at Hawk's Hill Group (Jennings); J7, pp. 31-32:

------------------- Episode 6

T: Okay, let's talk about the very end.

(t): What--, how--, what you thought about that.

S (N): That was sad.

S (S): The badger's gonna die.

S (A): I kind of thought that the badger died at the end.

S (N): It did.

S (T): Yeah, he probably was already dead.--

S (J): No he didn't, it never said.--

S (D): And I liked how he--

s(T): [continuing] 'cause he [Ben's father?] said he probably would have died--

S (J): But it probably would have died.--

s(T): [continuing] 'cause he said it probably won't make it through the night.

....

S (A): Yeah, but, I, I would have liked for the badger to live, but I, I think he did die.--
From the *Anastasia Krupnik* Group (Roberts); R5, p. 17 (Episode 8):

S (T): I think she [Anastasia] just wants to get rid of her name.  
(Text, Personal/Inferring/Statement)

T: I think so too.  
(Text, Personal, Conversation Maintenance/Inferring/Statement)

t: Kelly?  
(Conversation Maintenance/---/Question)

S (K): Um, it's like, because of the ballots, they don't know how to spell her name, and she thinks that they won't vote for her, and only four people voted for her, but some--, maybe they--, maybe--., well maybe some people do that, but maybe some other people think that she wouldn't be good for it.  
(Text/Inferring/Statement)

T: True.  
(Conversation Maintenance/Evaluating/Statement)

t: Could be, but she's still not considering that other point of view, she thinks it's all because of her name.  
(Text, Conversation Maintenance/Inferring/Statement)

t: Michelle?  
(Conversation Maintenance/---/Question)

S (M): [had raised her hand] Yeah, like Kelly said, maybe peop--, maybe people think she's a smart-aleck or they don't like her at all,--  
(Text, Conversation Maintenance/Inferring/Statement)

S (S): 'Cause she is [a smart-aleck].  
(Text/Evaluating/Statement)

S (T): Yeah, she is! [laughed]--  
(Conversation Maintenance/---/Statement)
From the *Ida Early* group (Scott); S4, pp. 18-19 (Episode 3):

T: Yesterday when I let you guys start reading--

S (Ma): What was the first one [chapter assigned]?  (Conversation Maintenance/--/Question) [repeated question]

T: [continuing] and I was sitting over there, I was chuckling about the chapter, but I thought

S (M): 'Close Call'?  (Text/Describing/Question)

T: Yeah the--, how did you feel about 'Close Call'?  (Text, Personal, Conversation Maintenance/Inferring/Question)

S (E): Well, what happened in that?  (Text, Conversation Maintenance/Describing/Question)

s (E): I forget--, I read that--; I read that--  (Text, Personal/Describing/Statement)

S: Well Ida--  (Text/Unknown/Statement)

S (M): That pig, remember,--

T: The pig.--  (Text/Describing/Statement)

s (M): [continuing] he [Archie] was holding onto the leg [of the pig]?  (Text, Conversation Maintenance/Describing/Question)

S (E): Oh, yeah--  (Conversation Maintenance/--/Statement)

....

S (R): I don't--, I don't think--

S (M): He almost--  (Text/Unknown/Statement)

S (T): [inaudible] pig--  (Text/Unknown/Statement)
S (R): [continuing] that the pig would have killed him [Archie].

S (M): Nuh uh. [sounded like a disagreement with Rick]

T: Yeah,--

S (R): The pig wouldn't have killed him, it would have just knocked him over and maybe hurt him.

S (M): But he was charging it, like little--, he was charging--

T: Pigs can be very dangerous.

S (M): Yeah.
APPENDIX F

SUMMARY DATA ON TEACHER AND STUDENT UTTERANCES IN THE THREE CODED DISCUSSIONS FOR EACH GROUP
## Table 27

**Summary Data on Teacher and Student Utterances in the Three Coded Discussions for Each Group**

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<th>Category I/Content</th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roberts</td>
<td>Scott</td>
<td>Jennings</td>
<td>Roberts</td>
<td>Scott</td>
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<td><strong>Text</strong></td>
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<td>100</td>
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**Note.** Percentages (%) represent the percentage of total teacher or student discussion utterances that were assigned each code. Percentages were calculated by dividing the number of teacher or student utterances in each code by the total number of coded teacher or student utterances (i.e., the Category III totals).

*Numbers (n) and percentages (%) in Category I total more than 100 because many utterances were assigned more than one Category I/Content code.*
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