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EXPLORING A CULTURE OF ASSESSMENT
WITH 9th-GRADE STUDENTS:
CONVERGENCES OF MEANING WITHIN
DRAMAS OF ASSESSMENT

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

By
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* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1996

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Approved by
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1996
ABSTRACT

This year-long, teacher-researcher study examined portfolio-based assessment in the context of a 9th-grade classroom in a large urban school district in a Midwestern city from multiple perspectives. The study sought to describe how a culture of assessment was constructed from multiple meaning systems as stakeholders interacted in one 9th-grade English classroom. The data included audiotapes from classroom interactions, videotapes from portfolio conferences, interviews with students and their parents, self-selected portfolios of students, as well as a portfolio from the students’ middle school. From these data, four case studies of individual students were constructed; they examined how these students’ attitudes toward assessment played into a culture of assessment. The data were analyzed using five frames: social semiotic, social drama, critical discourse, culture of resistance, and teacher-researcher, so that four dramatic threads emerged: (a) layered nature of the dramas, (b) portfolios functioning as sites of deconstruction, (c) language differences in portfolio negotiations related to gender, and (d) resistance as a construct in dramas of assessment.

This study indicated that a culture of assessment is characterized by complex, socioculturally constructed dramas involving negotiation, and contestation among stakeholders whose diverse meaning systems interacted with and against the culture of
school. These dramas involve plays and plays within plays as stakeholders attempted to open space for their own voices within that culture of school. Portfolios, as a vehicle for implementing a classroom-based assessment system, have the potential to serve as sites to interrogate how multiple meaning systems coalesce to shape practices of assessment.

Finally, teacher-researchers need to bring multiple perspectives to bear on classrooms as cultures to more fully understand the dynamic complexities which constitute them. From such understandings, teachers will be better able to deconstruct meaning systems which inform their own pedagogies and increase the potential of teaching more diverse and disenfranchised students.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study has been a journey with many swirling eddies and periods of backtracking as I labored to craft a text that portrayed the complexities of classroom life while honoring the diversity of voices that were a part of it. Finding my voice to articulate the rigor of scholarly work yet maintain a sense of personal journey that must be part of a teacher-researcher study challenged my own composing skills. This challenge pushed me to blend my persona as a teacher with my emerging voice as a researcher. The result is a study which is decidedly theoretical and at the same time connected with the daily realities and frustrations of teaching a class of 9th-grade students. However, this study would not have been possible without the support, guidance, patience, and keen criticism of important individuals along the way. First, I must thank the man students with whom I've had an opportunity to interact during my tenure as a classroom teacher. As a result of working with them, my love for learning and belief in the empowerment and freedom that comes with education have been greatly deepened.

My committee has allowed me the freedom and flexibility to find my own way into and out of this study, while alerting me to potential pitfalls and less than fruitful paths which I could have traveled along the way. Anna Soter has taught me not only the value of developing an unflinching critical eye toward my own work, but her advice to “get my hands into the data” was pivotal when I was struggling early in this study. She exemplifies the type of inquiring, restless intelligence I strive to develop as a researcher. In her courses, she challenged me to do
my best thinking and take the types of risks with my own writing that have helped stretch my imagination and see new possibilities. She has been both a mentor and a friend, and I am deeply indebted to her.

Terry Rogers has been instrumental in encouraging my interest in the complexities of working with portfolios, and her comments and suggestions on an early draft of the introductory chapter greatly shaped the direction of this study. Working with her as a student in the doctoral program showed me the intellectual excitement that is central to academic work. Never satisfied with the easy answers, she encouraged me to ask difficult questions concerning my data, and her comments and suggestions helped me develop the frames for the study to explore the dramatic possibilities of a classroom culture. She reminded me to build on my strengths and not be satisfied with anything but my best writing. I have benefited enormously from her guidance and friendship.

Finally, Rob Tierney, as the director of this dissertation, has not only challenged me to explore rich possibilities of the nature of assessment but provided intellectual support and guidance throughout the stages of this study. His generosity and belief in my potential have helped me during times when I struggled to make sense of complex data. I have enjoyed many hours of conversation on topics too numerous to list here, and his approach to problem solving and joy in the processes of inquiry will influence the research and teaching I undertake in the future. Rob has afforded me the opportunity to grow as a researcher and as a person, all the while treating me as a colleague. He has taught me exceedingly well.

Also, I have enjoyed the friendship of Larry Sipe. As fellow travelers, conversations about our current work and the future we hoped to create added greatly to my education at The Ohio State University. His sense of humor and wit have distracted me when I needed it. Larry
possesses a fine mind and a large heart and continues to be a good friend.

However, without the support and patience of my family, this study could not have been completed. I gave up many hours of time I could have spent with my sons, Dillon and Peter, to write “one more draft.” They are a joy to me, make me laugh when I truly need it, and always remind me that being part of a family is a full-time commitment.

But the greatest debt of gratitude goes to my wife, Ann. Throughout my doctoral program, she has made compromises (even when she didn’t believe the process would ever end) in support of my goals. She has listened patiently as I tried to explain and justify my research, made excellent suggestions for improvement, and acted as a careful and wise editor of this document. Ann’s voice and ways of knowing are woven into this study, and, without her support, my work would be greatly diminished. Her love and belief in our partnership is among my greatest treasures.

One journey ends; another begins. I am grateful for all these individuals who have been a part of it, and I will continue to benefit from their wise counsel.
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CHAPTER 1
DEFINING THE STUDY

Introduction

Underpinning this study — how a culture of assessment is constructed and negotiated in one urban 9th-grade classroom — is the assumption that classrooms are complex cultures in which learning occurs simultaneously on multiple levels. Within this culture, various interactions create a culture of learning unique to each classroom. These include roles of students, the teacher, what constitutes knowledge, the explicit and implicit communicative structures of classroom discourse, and the physical environment. The culture of the school and the student's own culture, typified by both their language and experiences articulated by their parents and caregivers, impact the classroom environment, as well. Viewed in this manner, a classroom is a dynamic site situated within and overlapped by other cultures.

Drawing on a theory of cognition, some researchers (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989) have attempted to describe how knowledge and learning are situated and defined by the culture of schooling. Others (Corno, 1989; Green, Kantor, & Rogers, 1991) have argued that studying classrooms involves acquiring a specific literacy about them, which would include the nuances of social interactions, the dynamics of power,
and the multilayered process of meaning, as well as a recognition of how unique and common characteristics of each classroom are constructed through the participants’ daily interactions.

From another perspective, sociolinguists, investigating how cultural meaning systems of Indian tribes indigenous to North America conflicted with and were misunderstood by a dominant White culture, found that schools tended to reinforce existing sociopolitical patterns of meaning (Basso, 1970; Phillips, 1983). Paralleling this research is work studying how sociolinguistic patterns of African American children may be marginalized and even discouraged in predominantly White schools (Farr & Daniels, 1986; Hale-Benson, 1982; Ogbu, 1988). These studies suggested that the existing communicative structures of schooling did not encourage diversity and that mismatches existed between the sociocultural patterns of subordinate groups (Ogbu, 1988) and the culture of schooling.

More recent studies examined relationships between personal and school literacy and explored social constructions of intertextuality in reading and writing instruction. This research has provided further insight into the complexity of the social processes of learning and has added to an understanding of how a variety of cultural meaning systems converge in classroom cultures (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Green, Harker, & Golden, 1987; Meyers, 1992). From these studies emerges an understanding of the importance of the role sociocultural processes in learning, yet these studies do not address how classroom assessment is specifically informed by these processes.
Therefore, to investigate how assessment is socially constructed and situated in a particular classroom and the role of stakeholders in that construction, it is also crucial to examine a culture of assessment because assessment is a core element in teaching. Recent research on assessment (Crook, 1988; Stiggins & Conklin, 1992) reported on the pervasiveness and complexity of assessment in classrooms. Also, proponents of educational reform (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Madaus, 1994) placed assessment as a key component of their agendas for change. In spite of this, we know little about how the cultures of students, schools, and community are intertwined to construct a culture of assessment within classrooms. Further, we lack evidence to explore how sociopolitical issues such as access to knowledge, the dynamics of power, and issues of gender, impact practices of classroom-based assessment. This study addresses these issues by examining how assessment practices and roles of stakeholders constructed a culture of assessment in my own classroom. Specifically, this teacher research study explores portfolios as sites where students, together with a classroom teacher, negotiate multiple meaning systems as they converge within practices of classroom-based assessment.

Prior to describing the present study, I will present a conception of assessment in a definition of culture and will report the results from an exploratory study I conducted in a 4th-grade classroom. This strategy will show how the definition of culture framed the research questions and how the exploratory study defined boundaries for study and helped refine those questions.
Defining Culture

In her conclusion to a recent essay exploring multiple perspectives for literacy research, Green (1992) made the following observations:

As we move into a period of richness of perspective, we need to develop ways of remaining open to the phenomena of interest, and ways to explore the contributions of various perspectives. To accomplish these tasks we will need to explore ways of building a community dialogue that will frame new questions, provide new ways of bringing new understandings from other disciplines to the forefront of our awareness. (p. 31)

Significant is Green’s call for ways of bringing new understandings from other disciplines to research into the practices of literacy, because she argued that one perspective may be inadequate for framing and defining new vistas of research in literacy. Taking multiple perspectives on the same phenomenon will allow an opportunity to address the complexities of classroom-based assessment and better understand the nuances of classroom culture. Therefore, the definition of culture will be multidisciplinary. This definition will be synthesized from some of the philosophical work of Langer (1942), scholarship in developmental theory of language and learning by Bruner (1986), writing in culture theory by cognitive anthropologist D’Anrade (1984), semiotic work by Halliday (1978), and Hodge and Kress (1979).

In her concluding chapter to Philosophy in a New Key, Langer (1942) described the "modern mind" as an incredible complex of impressions and transformations whose product is a fabric of meaning" (p. 280). She then made the following claim:
The warp of that fabric consists of what we call 'data,' the signs to which experience has conditioned us to attend, and upon which we act often without any conscious ideation. The woof is symbolism. Out of signs and symbols we weave our tissue of reality. (p. 280)

The tissue of reality is the culture which people inhabit. Signs and symbols are the foundations of meaning which people use to construct the culture. Further, Langer's (1942) metaphoric choice of 'tissue' suggested an organic dynamic quality of that culture as well as its fragility.

From a different perspective, Bruner (1986) explored the dynamic nature of culture and extended it by noting the constitutive of characteristic of language. In his essay, Bruner focused on how language functions in constituting a culture of education, wherein he argued:

Once one takes the view that a culture itself comprises an ambiguous text that is constantly in need of interpretation by those who participated in it, then the constitutive role of language in creating a social reality becomes a topic of practical concern. (p. 122)

Bruner recognized the active role of language in both simultaneously creating a culture and interpreting that culture. As a result, focusing on how language and those who use it interact to create a classroom culture is significant for literacy research.

Together, Langer's (1942) and Bruner's (1986) work suggested a view of culture in which the participants constructed that culture through an interactive manipulation of multiple meaning systems. For conducting research in a classroom, this perspective allows for consideration of not only the language participants use to construct the learning boundaries of the classroom, but also the configurations of the physical space of the room itself. Included are daily routines and other texts which
contribute to the overall environment. Viewing these meaning systems as texts enables a consideration of the interplay among them as feature of the construction of the classroom culture.

Echoing this particular sense of how culture is constructed, cognitive anthropologist D’Arande (1984) summarized his thinking about “cultural systems” and posited a view of culture:

... consisting of learned systems of meaning, communicated by means of natural language and other symbol systems, having representational, directive, and affective functions, and capable of creating cultural entities and particular senses of reality. Through these systems of meaning, groups of people adapt to their environment and structure interpersonal activities. (p. 116)

Significant for the present study of the culture of classroom assessment is D’Arande’s (1984) notion of systems of meaning as ‘learned.’ Questioning how stakeholders in a particular cultural system learn that system and how they subsequently communicate in it becomes salient for examining assessment, because such questions provide insight into processes of construction of that culture. This view leads to conceptualizing how classrooms extend beyond school walls and involve intersecting layers of meaning.

To explore these layers within a definition of culture, the work of semioticians such as Halliday (1978) and Hodge and Kress (1988) must be explored. Halliday’s seminal work in sociolinguistics and the nature of language suggested the importance of extending the sense of classroom culture beyond the walls of the room itself to
include the multiple layers of meaning in language experiences of children. Halliday summarized:

I have become convinced of the importance of the socio-linguistic background to everything that goes on in the classroom. The sociolinguistic patterns of the community, the language of the family, neighborhood and school, and the personal experience of language from the earliest infancy are among the most fundamental elements in a child's environment for learning. (p. 5)

Halliday's argument begs consideration of how language uses from various cultural contexts might converge to constitute the culture of the classroom. The work of Hodge and Kress (1988) in social semiotics refined my thinking about this convergence by questioning how texts function as signs to both constitute and document a culture. They argued:

Every system of signs is the product of processes of semiosis, and documents the history of its own constitution. Terms in a system have value by virtue of their place in that system. At the same time, a system is constantly being reproduced and constituted in texts. Otherwise it would cease to exist. So texts are both the material realization of systems of signs and also the site where change continually takes place. (p. 6)

To think about texts in the culture of assessment as potential sites wherein change can occur is to explore the idea of intertextuality, or how stakeholders in culture make connections among texts. From this perspective, questions arise about whether some forms of assessment might promote intertextual links among experiences, stories, or other educative features of a learner more readily than others and how the process might unfold. Significant work in this area has conducted by Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) and Lemke (1988, 1990, 1994) concerning intertextual links in
reading and writing classrooms, the roles of intertextuality in constructing genres, as well as the place of intertextuality in educational research. However, not yet explored is how intertextual links function across genres of assessment. The definition outlined herein provides a different perspective of assessment, because it assumes the interlaced nature of cultural meaning systems and suggests a way to examine how these meaning systems converge within practices of assessment. Further, scrutinizing the nature of these convergences will assist in the understanding of issues of power and gender as they play out in classroom-based assessment. Overall, the work of these theorists guided my current definition of culture as summarized by the following four propositions:

1. Cultures are dynamic and socially constructed by the stakeholders within that culture.

2. The construction of meaning systems is an ongoing process of meaning, making involving simultaneous manipulation of language and other meaning systems.

3. These meaning systems are learned by the stakeholders in that culture, and shifts in contexts may allow for new combinations of these meaning systems in different ways.

4. Part of the social construction of a culture involves making and acknowledging intertextual links among different kinds of texts by stakeholders within that culture.

This definition of the nature of culture forms the conceptual boundaries for this study in my 9th-grade classroom, boundaries which help create the interpretive frame
of this study. From this frame, questions can be posed concerning how particular assessment practices and other meaning systems (including language and other communicative structures) interact within specific contexts. To refine these questions about the culture of assessment, I conducted an exploratory study in a 4th-grade classroom. The next section of this chapter discusses the results of my study.

**Reporting from an Exploratory Study on a Culture of Assessment**

Research is needed which examines how students, together with and perhaps in opposition to other stakeholders, learn, construct, and negotiate the practices, conventions, and genres of assessment as they evolve within the context of the classroom and the larger culture of school. For initial consideration, I explored these assessment issues in an urban, 4th-grade classroom from October 1993 through March 1994, observing how the culture of assessment was constructed and negotiated by the students and their teacher. The approach was ethnographic, i.e., I spent three days weekly in the classroom, observing instructional routines, interviewing selected students and the teacher, collecting documents, and videotaping classroom assessment events. I also interviewed these same students' parents. The goal was to produce what anthropologists refer to as a “thick description” of a culture of assessment.

Analysis of the data sought emerging relationships among physical structures within the classroom, observations, interviews, and videotapes, i.e., patterns and themes indicating how structures of the classroom interrelated to support a particular approach to assessment and whether other data confirmed or denied them. These
relationships included views of the nature of assessment from students, their teacher, and parents, as well as the language used to articulate those views. Additionally, as a method of member-checking, data were shared with the classroom teacher and the students to elicit their interpretations. The intent was to explore the possibilities of member checking as a data source (Noffke, 1990) and create space for alternative interpretations of the same events.

Results suggested that the classroom teacher articulated an assessment philosophy which valued multiple perspectives and focused on the processes of learning in language acquisition. Based on analyses of interview data, observational fieldnotes, and collected documents, I concluded that students had a sense of themselves as writers and readers and felt dissonance between the culture of assessment in their classroom and the demands put upon them by high stakes testing from outside the classroom. Additionally, the physical structure of this classroom encouraged collaborative work through display of specific materials (i.e., posters), learning centers within the classroom, and pets which required students’ care. Further, the students in this study had a supportive, literacy-rich environment outside of school, and they understood assessment as a learning process in the larger context of literacy. Yet, missing was a clear understanding of how this environment evolved, how a culture of assessment had been negotiated over time, whose agendas were compromised, and what roles gender and the culture of schooling played in this process.

Results of this exploratory study therefore heightened an awareness of the complexities involved in studying classroom-based assessment and made evident the
need to be present in a classroom from the first day of school to better interpret the nature of assessment. This would allow an opportunity to observe the initial boundaries of assessment, witness the articulation of the learner expectations, and record the negotiations which took place as practices of assessment were described. During the course of this exploratory study, my interests in the methodological and interpretive possibilities of teacher research were evolving, with an increasing interest in how the simultaneous roles of teacher and researcher impact the social construction of assessment in a particular classroom. Other questions arose: What possibilities existed for involving students as collaborators in such inquiry? How would the dual perspectives of classroom teacher with curricular responsibilities and researcher with the conventions and expectations of an academic community shape the process of data collection? How would I fairly represent the dynamic, polysemous culture of a classroom in which I was in a position of power and authority?

**Framing the Questions for the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore how 9th-grade students participated in and negotiated the culture of assessment in a classroom wherein portfolios were a primary vehicle for assessment. The work of Guba and Lincoln (1989) in constructivist or 4th-generation evaluation informed the epistemological perimeters of this study by identifying three beliefs pivotal to the paradigmatic allegiances of this study: (1) Multiple realities exist as socially constructed entities; (2) the investigator and the participants in research projects exist interactively so that data and findings are
a construction of that interactive relationship; and (3) analysis/interpretation is a dialectical process that does not exist separately from the collection of data. These beliefs suggested a view that knowledge was problematic because competing accounts of any given phenomena existed simultaneously. Also, knowledge was constantly shifting as the relationships among the stakeholders evolved within the research project, and knowledge was situated and contextualized because the research process was framed and shaped by relationships among the site, stakeholder interaction, and sociolinguistic experiences of participants. Five framing questions shaped an epistemological lens for the present study:

1. What meaning systems converge as a classroom culture is negotiated by learners?

2. What are the conventions, norms, and regulative practices of assessment in this classroom?

3. How are these constructed and dramatized by stakeholders in negotiations which characterize assessment?

4. What roles do students, in concert with and in resistance to a classroom teacher, enact as they negotiate assessment practices?

5. How do relationships of power and gender figure into dramatizations of assessment processes?

Conducting the study in my own classroom with these questions guiding the inquiry allowed for a perspective which considered multiple views on the same phenomena and engaged various stakeholders (including students, the classroom
teacher, parents, and faculty) in an ongoing construction of meaning. In this way, member-checking became a source of data collection and multiple discourses which presented competing interpretations of the data which emerged.

Conceived in this way, this study is significant for several reasons. First, perceptions of assessment in American education are shifting. Traditional forms of assessment are being scrutinized and criticized for their purported failure to measure students' abilities to understand and think (Garcia & Pearson, 1994; Glaser & Silver, 1994; Nickerson, 1989; Stiggins & Conklin, 1992; Wolf, Bixby, Glenn, & Gardner, 1991). To address these issues, some scholars (Wolf et al., 1991) argued for a shift from a culture of 'testing' to a culture of 'assessment,' in which one goal was to sample performances of thought. But there was little research which explored what a culture of assessment was and how it was constructed, and what types of interplay existed among assessment practices and other meaning systems in classrooms. This study sought to begin to fill this gap. As conceptions of assessment shifted, questions must be asked concerning how new views of assessment fit with the cultures of students who had historically been marginalized (such as minority students or students in large urban systems) (Garcia & Pearson, 1994). In this way, broadened understandings of the complexities of classroom-based assessment can be developed. This study will contribute to this development by presenting views and stories of assessment which have not been part of the traditional research discourse of assessment.

Next, as notions of assessment shifted, interpretive frameworks through which the nature of classrooms is understood and the complexities of assessment are
described will need to shift in order to capture new types of knowledge. Some researchers in cultural and literacy studies (Bizzell, 1994; Bloome & Bailey, 1992; Downing, Harkin, & Sosnoski, 1994; Moll, 1992) argued for reconceptions of the way the following are considered: language, teaching practices, and pedagogical applications in classrooms. Further, theorists and practitioners in feminism (Berry & Patraka, 1994; Jarret, 1991; Lather, 1991; Treichler, 1994), post-modernism (Delandshire & Petrosky, 1994; McLaren, 1992; Schilb, 1991; Sosnoski, 1991), and semiotic theory (Blonsky, 1985; Eco, 1976; Greimas, 1990; Halliday, 1978; Hodge & Kress, 1988) challenged the way configurations of data are viewed and assigned meaning. This study resonates with the work of these scholars inasmuch as their opinions and research influenced my view of culture and interpretation of the data. As a result, a sociocultural view is presented, centered around social-constructivist understandings of language and influenced by multiple frames to interpret assessment data. This study will further define these interpretive shifts that others in research communities have already posited.

**Defining Key Terms**

When conducting research on the culture of assessment, one of the issues is a common understanding of terms. Literacy researchers (Gumperz & Gumperz, 1992) argued that, from a sociolinguistic point of view, perceptions of language in education have changed enormously in the 30 years prior to this study. These changes have contributed to views of research in schools and how it is conducted. Therefore, in any
study in which language (both spoken and written) is a primary data source, key terms require definition.

**Assessment.** The conscious act of judging and valuing the work of learners. Teachers are constantly assessing the progress of their students in the classroom, while students assess their own work and the work of each other. For the purposes of this study, the 'dimension of episode' is included as part of the definition of assessment. Wolf (1993) argued that episodes were part of a process, and the process of selecting and shaping a representative collection of work yielded a kind of autobiographical understanding that included knowledge of past change and the prospect of future development. This imbues assessment with the connotations of journey which are situated within the culture of a classroom, and it allows inclusion of these episodes as integral part of a developing narrative of literacy and learning of each stakeholder.

**Genre of assessment.** Different types of assessment that were used in the classroom, useful because it implied that specific kinds of assessment (such as teacher-constructed tests, standardized tests, teacher-led discussion, quizzes, performances in classroom settings, etc.) had identifiable characteristics and were a part of the socially-constructed culture of assessment. Viewed this way, it was possible to view how certain genres of assessment readily promoted intertextuality, the acknowledged connection to other texts in the experiences of a learner, while others did not.

**Portfolios.** Within these episodes of learning, portfolios become 'sites' where students, using their own work in a conference setting, could make choices to describe, reaffirm, and even rewrite the text of their own learning. A critical aspect of defining
portfolios this way was that students own the portfolio, because it is a part of the ongoing work they did in the classroom. The portfolio then was a site within episodes of assessment that were linked to the larger stories of learning, socially constructed from the interplay of various sign systems. These sign systems were at the cultures of community, school, and the classroom itself.

**Projections for the Study**

In this chapter, epistemological borders of this study were outlined, my conception of culture was defined, and the results of the exploratory study were presented. This chapter also presented the significance of the study and definitions of key terms. Chapter 2 will review literature and develop interpretive frames, and Chapter 3 will describe methods of data collection. Chapter 4 will present an analysis of the classroom context, and Chapter 5 will present four case studies of students in the class. Finally, Chapter 6 will explore issues and new directions for teacher research on classroom-based assessment.
CHAPTER 2
FRAMING THE STUDY

Introduction

This chapter develops the multiple frames which were used to analyze the data. The complexity of literate activity in general and classroom assessment in particular calls for multiple perspectives (Beach, 1992; Green, 1992) to better understand how various meaning systems coalesce. This first section develops a semiotic frame based on the work of key theorists and scholars in the field. Then, the frames of critical discourse, social drama, cultural resistance, and teacher research are discussed. Finally, the impact of these frames on the present study will be presented.

Social Semiotic Frame

Semiotics, the theory of how signs and symbols function within meaning systems, is a broad field which includes theorists as diverse as Eco (1976), Greimas (1990), and Halliday (1978). The philosophical work of Peirce, the historical analyses of Karl Marx, the structural linguistic analyses of Saussure, the psychoanalytic theories of Freud, and the structuralist analyses of Barthes are cited by semioticians as being influential to the nature and direction of semiotic work (Blonsky, 1985; Merrell,
1992). It is beyond the scope of this study to survey the entire field of semiotics. Instead, the frame for this study is derived from the social semiotics work of Halliday (1974, 1978), Halliday and Martin (1994), and Hodge and Kress (1979, 1988). Also considered was the work of Bakhtin (1981) concerning the heteroglossic features of language and the nature of genre, as well as Luke's (1988) research on how texts imply ideological positions and construct a particular discourse of knowledge in schools and classrooms. The result was an interdisciplinary synthesis that allowed a focus on the context, purpose, and language of assessment in each case and argued how these signs and symbols systems interacted in the social construction of the culture of assessment.

The foundation of social semiotics can be attributed to the work of Halliday (1978), who wrote of the social processes of meaning:

The nature of the social processes tends to be expressed through ideational meanings, and the nature of the role relationships through interpersonal meanings. Meanings of the third kind, the textual, express the particular semiotic mode that is being adopted. (p. 133)

For Halliday, semiotics provided a way to view how all these signs (social, interpersonal, and textual) interrelate. In later work, Halliday and Hasan (1985) recognized that social semiotics must consider systems of meaning and address relationships among language and social structures. To do this, he posed three concepts to interpret the social context of texts: (a) the field of discourse, or what is happening in a given situation; (b) tenor of discourse, or the identity status and roles of participants; and (c) the mode of discourse, or the role of language in a given situation. More recently, Halliday and Martin (1994) used a semiotic perspective to view how the
conceptualization of writing and function of texts shaped the epistemologies of scientific disciplines. Their analysis allowed them to argue that the language of science construed a particular meaning or semiotic system and therefore a particular way of constructing and validating knowledge. Similarly, looking at the language and practices of assessment in a classroom context allowed for insights into how stakeholders in that context construed meaning about assessment. However, central to such a consideration is a look at how power dynamics among students, teachers, and parents impacted the classroom context, as well as the impact of the social context itself on the construction of meaning. The work of Hodge and Kress (1979, 1988) in social semiotic theory was useful for refining a frame for analysis of context and examination relationships of power. Hodge and Kress extended the early work of Halliday (1978) and reconstituted semiotics informed by social theory as analytic practice:

> It is semiotics, some kind of semiotics that must provide this possibility of analytic practice, for the many people in different disciplines who deal with different problems of social meaning and need ways of describing and explaining social structures through which meaning is constituted. (p. 2)

In order to develop ways of describing and explaining social structures through which meaning is constituted, Hodge and Kress (1988) built their theory of social semiotics, on a “logonomic system,” which was a set of rules prescribing the conditions for production and reception of meaning. Furthermore,

> logonomic rules rest on a set of classifications of people, topics, and circumstances which are the result of contestation over long periods, but which ultimately derive from ruling ideas of the dominant group. (p. 5)
Logonomic systems, Hodge and Kress (1988) argued, implied a theory of society, an epistemology, and a theory of social modalities “which reflect contradictions and conflicts in social formations” (p. 5). Understanding how meaning was constructed and contested within the complex networks of rules and social practices was the work of social semiotics. Three terms are key in completing an articulation of a social semiotic frame: (a) message, or the smallest semiotic form that has concrete existence; it has directionality – a source, a goal, and social context and purpose; (b) text, which was a structure of message or message traces that had a socially ascribed unity; and (c) discourse, which was the social process in which texts are embedded. For Hodge and Kress (1988), the relationship between text and logonomic system was critical:

... every system of signs is the product of processes of semiosis, and documents the history of its own constitution. Terms in a system have value by virtue of their place in that system. At the same time, a system is constantly being reproduced and reconstituted in texts. Otherwise, it would cease to exist. So texts are both material realization of systems of signs and also the site where change continually takes place. (p. 6)

Enriching this semiotic notion of text was the work of Bakhtin (1981, 1986) on heteroglossia and genre theory. For Bakhtin, heteroglossia was a set of conditions that elevated context over text. An utterance in one set of social and historical conditions would have different meaning in another set (Bakhtin, 1981). In other words, all meaning was dynamic and was in a dialogic relationship with other meaning. Bakhtin theorized:
As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes one's own only when then speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates when appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention.... Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated-overpopulated-with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents is a difficult and complicated process. (p. 293)

All texts, therefore, were social events in that they were constructions by speakers/writers in dialogue with both other speakers/writers as well as previous texts which the person creating the text had articulated. This view of language made all speech acts intertextual. For Bakhtin (1986), all communication involved negotiations among webs of intertextual relationships. Key to this negotiation was his conception of speech genres, defined by claiming that language was realized in the form of individual concrete utterances, and each separate utterance was individual, but each sphere in which language was used developed its own relatively stable type of utterances. These he called speech genres.

Further, Bakhtin (1986) distinguished between what he called primary or simple and secondary or complex genres, in which the former was absorbed into the latter as it was constructed. For example, in an article researching classroom discourse, conversations between students, a primary genre, were inscribed into a discourse that was educational research, a secondary genre. According to Bakhtin (1986), this process shaped the secondary genre while simultaneously recasting the primary genre into a different network of meaning. Viewed in this way, both oral and written
utterances, or texts, were constantly changing and being changed by other texts as they were articulated by individuals in different heteroglossic or contextual situations.

The work of Bakhtin (1986) informed the social semiotic frame proposed by refining Hodge and Kress' (1988) notion of texts, as both material realization of systems of signs and also the site wherein change continually took place to include a conception of genre. For the social semiotic frame, genres became clusters of texts within systems of signs that produced the logonome rules of a particular discourse. An example to illustrate this relationship was drawn from classroom-based assessment. Students' responses to questions, student-teacher interactions, and student conversations were the primary genres; different forms of assessment, including teacher-constructed tests, quizzes, or portfolios were secondary genres of assessment. The system of signs was the culture of assessment which was situated within the logonome discourse of the culture of school. Other discourses and meaning systems, such as the communities of the students, with their own genres and sign systems, intersected in the classroom to construct the culture of assessment. A social semiotic frame, informed by the theoretic work of Bakhtin (1986), allowed for an exploration of those intersections. In summary, two guiding propositions defined this social semiotic frame:

1. Assessment in a classroom exists as a socially constituted discourse with discursive practices and rules that govern construction and reception of knowledge.

2. These practices and rules interact with personal meaning systems of stakeholders involves in the culture of assessment and are reflected in texts (oral and written) these stakeholders produce. These texts are
shaped by heteroglossic forces that are as important as the texts themselves in determining meaning. (p. 23)

Proposition #1 provided a way to connect assessment and learning by looking specifically at how the practices of assessment in the classroom suggested particular views of knowledge, i.e., how the portfolio conference was structured, the language was used in the conference, and how these interactions fit with the larger concept of portfolio. These views (both teacher and student) were part of the social construction of assessment. Proposition #2 functioned as an avenue to explore how a student’s personal meaning systems interacted with features of the classroom culture. This allowed for treating context as equal to texts produced in that context. For example, if a student commented on the standardized testing as part of classroom instruction, the context in which their comments were made (teacher-suggested topic, following three straight days of testing) must be considered. To conduct his kind of examination and ferret out these relationships, work in critical discourse theory is useful.

Critical Discourse Frame

In the present study, the term “critical discourse” is used in a way similar to Luke (1995) to mean work that tried to see how broader formations of discourse and power were manifest in the everyday, quotidian aspects of texts in use. To develop this critical discourse frame, focus was limited to work that was primarily educational. Consideration is given to Foucault (1970) and to recent critical discourse theorists who had expanded Foucault’s ideas to address specific concerns in education. Foucault’s
influence as a thinker was widespread across numerous academic fields. However, for exploring critical discourse in education, his value lay in his study of discursive practices. Foucault (1970) proposed:

It seems to me that the historical analysis of scientific discourse should, in the last resort, be subject, not to a theory of the knowing subject, but rather to a theory of discursive practice. (p. xiv)

It was possible to substitute ‘educational’ for ‘scientific’ in this context and refocus a line of research that viewed how discursive practices of classroom-based assessment reflected the conventions and meaning systems of both individuals and institutions, as well as how these are interrelated. Central for understanding how interrelated networks of discursive practices ‘opened up’ and ‘closed down’ spaces where meaning was negotiated was to emphasize how they were manifested in language. In an essay charting how shifts in literature and rhetoric were bound up with shifts in how writing is valued in western culture, Foucault (1977) argued:

Writing in western culture automatically dictates that we place ourselves in the virtual space of self-representation and reduplication; since writing refers not to a thing but to speech, a work of language only advances more deeply into the intangible density of the mirror, calls forth the double of this already doubled writing, discovers in this way a possible and impossible infinity, ceaselessly strives after speech, maintains it beyond the death which condemns it, and frees a murmuring stream. p. (56)

For Foucault (1977), language was not a neutral medium by which ‘reality’ was represented. Rather, language advanced more deeply into the intangible ‘density of the mirror’ and returned infinitely into the flow and eddies of meaning. Meaning, in this sense, was process whereby texts (written and spoken) endlessly resonated and
reverberated against networks of sociocultural practices. Foucault’s emphasis on discursive practices provided insight into how particular cultures (schooling, for example) established boundaries which allowed for certain possibilities of meaning and excluded others. His view of language suggested that, to deconstruct how texts figured into the power dynamics of allowing and excluding meaning, it was critical to examine how structures of practice are realized in language. In other words, to better understand complexities of classroom-based assessment, research which viewed the language of assessment as it was manifested in practices of teachers and students was needed. Further, these assessment practices existed historically in a larger discourses of the culture of schooling; therefore, they must be viewed against, within, and in resonance to these discourses.

Literacy researcher Luke (1988, 1991, 1993) built on Foucault’s (1970) analyses to write about how the artifacts of schooling are viewed (Luke, 1988) and how people “critique the social construction and economic production of reading practices, or reader-text relations, of teacher-student interaction” (1991, p. 19). Luke (1993) explored how the uses of narrative in classroom instruction produced configurations of gender, class, and color, and argued that such configurations engendered constructions of classroom literacy that were far from arbitrary or idiosyncratic. In reality, it was a feature of educational discourse, and it was a key normalizing and reproductive strategy of schooling. This normalizing resulted in particular ideological constructions of ‘authorship’ and ‘story’ which subsequently constituted students’ understandings of these constructs. In other words, Luke challenged the historic belief often put forth in
literacy research that the author's role was neutral and facilitated by an ideological-free narrative in the classrooms. Instead, Luke (1993) posited a more purposeful agenda:

The institutional site of the school sets out what will count as interactive procedures for the constitution of narrative, and the selection of appropriate semantic/ideological contents. Here, then, criteria for doing the story's runs side by side with criteria for describing the natural and social world. (p. 149)

For Luke (1988), the issue was that texts, which were part of the world of students through the agencies of popular culture, were systematically excluded by the narratives of schooling articulated in classrooms by teachers purporting to being engaged in authentic reading and writing with their students through instructional practices such as whole language instruction. Incorporating Luke's work on critical literacy into a critical discourse frame provided scrutiny of the ideological suppositions embedded in language which was used in the classroom. In this way, it became possible to discuss how the language of assessment constructed particular relationships of power. From a curriculum theory perspective, Green (1993) also used Foucault's (1977) work to interrogate how institutional discourses constrain learners. Green sought to demonstrate how educational curriculum values certain written texts (his 'insistence of the letter') both as object of study and the vehicle of education, so that uniformity and compliance by learners was a primary goal of education. For inquiring into classroom-based assessment, Green's work widened the critical discourse frame to question how assessment was textualized and turned into an object which encouraged uniform responses by stakeholders. In this study, this led to probing tensions between
perceptions of portfolios as a process-centered form of assessment and students' views of assessment as a product to determine deficits in their achievement.

Finally, Gutierrez and Larson (1995) and Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson (1995b) utilized the constructs of scripts and counterscripts to view how teachers and students create interpretive space in the process of constructing a classroom culture. Key to their research was the Foucauldian notion of how power was inscribed into the regulative practices of schooling, characterized as follows (Gutierrez & Larson, 1995):

Certainly, to understand the consistently asymmetrical power relations, and epistemological conflict, or what counts as knowledge, evident in school communities, we need to examine communities of practice and knowledge construction from both situated and socio-historical perspectives. (p. 447)

To distinguish between teacher and student scripts in terms of power relations, the text continued:

The monologic script, the primary script in the classroom on which this study is based, appears to be exclusively in control of the teacher, whose own socialization reflects he dominant cultural values invoked in schools. While some students contribute to and participate in the teacher script, those who do not comply with the teacher's rules for participation form their own counterscript. (p. 447)

Drawing from Gutierrez's work with scripting provided a way to push this critical discourse frame toward a dramatic orientation and consider how the students' meaning systems were dramatized within assessment practices. To summarize, two propositions for studying classroom-based assessment could be derived from a critical discourse frame:
1. Portfolios and other genres of assessment were embedded in larger discourses of school and community and became sites where texts valued in the culture of assessment were affirmed, negotiated, and contested.

2. The language used to construct the practices of assessment suggested particular ideological and epistemological views; these views, in turn, constructed perspectives on assessment that reflected particular institutional biases and excluded other views.

Proposition #1 provided a way to view certain types of assessment documents as genres and inquire how some assessment genres elicited or prohibited intertextual connections by learners. For example, a portfolio might have generated different types of conversations and comments about assessments than final exam. These comments might provide different types of insights into how learners interrelate other meaning systems (the school, their community) into their perceptions of the nature of assessment. Finally, proposition #2 suggested the importance of looking carefully at the language used by teachers to define and explain assessment, and how that language constructed a particular ideological stance that excluded other possibilities for learners. For example, the way a teacher directed a student to consider their portfolio or reconceptualize a piece of work and may reflect implicit institutional or personal biases that teacher had about literacy. These biases may cause the teacher to silence thinking, reading, and writing alternatives that interested a learner, in favor of approaches that matched the curriculum. Also, what remained to be examined was the ideological nature of particular texts and how those texts shaped the culture of assessment in
specific directions. These directions included the implicit goals of the classroom teacher, as well as the goals of assessment held by the school community.

These directions included questions about what types of power dynamics were created and maintained as stakeholders assumed roles within dramas of assessment. To explore such dramas, however, a frame emphasizing the dramatic nature of social interaction needed to be articulated. Therefore, this next section develops a frame of social drama as a way to explore the dramatic nature of classroom-based assessment.

**Social Drama Frame**

Among the scholars who developed social drama as a way to think about human interaction was anthropologist Turner (1957, 1968), who, in his article linking dramatic ritual and anthropology (Turner, 1979), defined social drama:

> I hold that the social drama form occurs on all levels of social organization from state to family. A social drama is initiated when the peaceful tenor of regular norm-governed social life is interrupted by the breach of a rule controlling one of its salient relationships. Since social dramas suspend normal everyday role-playing, they interrupt the flow of social life and force a group to take cognizance of its own behavior in relation to its own values, even question at times the value of those values. In other words, dramas induce and contain reflexive processes and generate cultural frames in which reflexivity can find a legitimate place. (p. 83)

Turner’s definition contains key concepts which were useful for developing a social drama frame from which to view classroom-based assessment. First, even though in portfolio-based assessment practices one of the goals was to embed assessment within learning, students may view all assessment as a ‘breach’ of
classroom practice in the sense that it interrupts established instructional relationships between students and a classroom teacher. As a result, the roles that teachers and students play are renegotiated in an assessment context. Second, part of drama's value is its ability to generate what Turner calls 'reflexivity.' In this study, looking at how using portfolios create dramas of assessment and how such dramas generate reflexivity (or a lack of it) is significant for gaining insights into how students view assessment processes.

Another important theorist for articulating a social drama frame was Goffman (1959), whose volume exploring social interactions and social situations used a dramatic metaphor to characterize how people presented themselves. Describing what he termed 'dramatic realization,' Goffman explained:

> While in the presence of others, the individual typically infuses his activity with signs which dramatically highlight and portray confirmatory facts that otherwise might remain unapparent or obscure. (p. 30)

In terms of classroom-based assessment, how students and teachers dramatically portray growth and development, what came to the fore and what remained obscure were issues which Goffman (1959) raised. Further, considering Turner's (1976) and Goffman's (1959) work in social drama together encouraged exploration of how students' and teachers' roles shift as dramas of assessment unfold in a classroom culture, as well as how other meaning systems which crisscrossed that culture became infused into these dramas. Other researchers have used drama as a metaphor and extended the work of Goffman and Turner into new intellectual arenas. For example,
Courtney (1990) argued for links between drama and intelligence and claimed the dramatic world "we create is a significant element in a universe of cognitive meaning" (p. 10). From an ethnographic perspective, McLaren (1986) viewed the rituals of schooling as a form of symbolic drama and considered how these dramas created and maintained relationships of power and domination in classrooms. The work of these two scholars attested to the wide scope which a dramatic metaphor brings to research in literacy education.

However, another facet of a social drama frame was director-actor relationships, how they develop and shift within a classroom culture, and how these roles affect classroom assessment processes. To better understand these concerns, it was useful to review the work people involved in theater, beginning with Brecht (1964) on the nature of acting. For Brecht, the development of an actor was primarily social. In an essay outlining some principles of theater, Brecht (1964) made the following statements about the learning process involved in acting:

And the learning process must be coordinated so that the actor learns as the other actors are learning and develops his character as they are developing theirs. For the smallest social unit is not the single person but two people. In life we too develop one another. (p. 197)

Brecht’s (1964) insistence of the social and communal development of actors translated into a social drama frame to examine classroom assessment in the sense that a culture of assessment developed as stakeholders (actors) develop one another. In other words, incorporating Brecht’s theories of acting into this frame provided a way to view how the roles which students and teachers enact within assessment dramas were
tied to the larger social relations of the classroom. For example, the stance or role a student adopted in a portfolio conference may, in part, be influenced by how that student views the teacher when assessing other students, or the comments the teacher makes about assessment to the class as a whole.

Another important theorist for expanding notions of role and actor in social drama was Stanislavski (1989), who discussed the development of an actor:

An actor can subject himself to the wishes and indications of a playwright or a director and execute them mechanically, but to experience his role he must use his living desires, engendered and worked over by himself, and he must exercise his own will not that of another. (p. 50)

If classroom-based assessment were viewed dramatically, Stanislavski’s thoughts on actors suggested that, if students were to gain real insights into their own literacy growth, they must turn inward and reflect on their own roles and processes as learners. In a portfolio-based system, which is the basis of this study, it becomes interesting to inquire into whether students have opportunities to take responsibility for their own assessment and learning, how engaged students are in assessment processes, and how they voice their awareness of engagement in portfolio conferences.

Besides viewing students as actors, it also was possible to view a classroom teacher as a director in a drama. One of the questions that guided this study concerned what roles students and a teacher enacted as they negotiated practices of assessment. In my own role as a teacher, I attempted to direct students toward meaningful learning and evaluation experiences in the classroom. It would be helpful to know how much
my own direction opened or closed interpretive space for students in terms of assessment.

Brook’s (1986) and Marowitz’s (1986) work on the nature of directing influenced my thinking in the development of this frame of social drama. For Brook (1986), directing involved balancing tensions between controlling what actors and actresses did and accommodating change that inevitably comes from performance. However, both of these were subservient to what Brook (1986) called a ‘directorial conception,’ which entailed seeing ...

an image that precedes the first day’s work, while a sense of ‘direction’ crystallizes into an image at the very end of the process. The director needs only one conception, which he must find in life, not in art, which is the sense of what an act of theater is doing in the world, why it is there. (p. xii)

Analogously, as a classroom teacher, I brought an ‘educational conception’ into the classroom that preceded the first day of school. The ‘sense of education’ began to crystallize with interaction with learners and mold how one can involve all stakeholders in reaching goal of education. What became both problematic and interesting for this study was how my own agenda and intentions as a teacher/director shaped some assessment opportunities and closed down others for students/actors.

Marowitz (1986) considered directing to be primarily an exercise in intellectual confrontation and interpretation rather than a procedure of someone imposing orders on others. He characterizes it this way:

The modern director, then is not simply a person who imposes order upon artistic subordinates in order to express a writer’s meaning, but someone who challenges the assumptions of a work of art and uses
mise-en-scene activity to pit his or her beliefs against those of the play. Without that confrontation, that sense of challenge, true direction cannot take place, for unless the author’s work is engaged on an intellectual level equal to its own, the play is merely transplanted from one medium to another. (p. 6)

In terms of assessment, Marowitz’s (1986) thinking about direction suggested that the classroom teacher/director needed to engage with and confront student work on an intellectual level equal to students’ intentions. For this study, what became interesting was investigating the nature of engagement in the context of portfolios. During conferences, how does a teacher’s/director’s role impact how the student views the process of assessment? What type of compromises do stakeholders (both teachers and students) make as assessment is negotiated? These questions grow out of bringing an awareness of the nature of directing as characterized by Brook (1986) and Marowitz (1986).

Another facet of this drama frame was work in process drama (O’Neill & Lambert, 1982; O’Neill, 1995). Process drama is a “mode of learning’ that is essentially social and involves contact, communication, and negotiation of meaning” (O’Neill & Lambert, 1982, p. 12). British educator Heathcote (1985) viewed process drama work as exploratory and characterized it as ‘drama making,’ which worked, Heathcote estimated, by employing all past experiences available to the group at the present moment and any conjecture of imagination they were capable of in an attempt to create a living moving picture of life. Significant for the present purpose was that process drama was based in social interaction and involved an intersection among lived experience of individuals and texts used to initiate exploratory work. A “text or
pretext," as O’Neill (1995) termed it, was “the source or impulse for the drama process ...
a reason for the work. It also carries the meaning of a text that exists before the event” (p. xv). Based on this definition, a pretext might be literary, such as a poem or section of a short story, but it might also be something written by a student.

In terms of assessment, a portfolio could be viewed as a pretext which served as a reason for negotiating and exploring learners’ literacy development. Portfolios included conferences in which a classroom teacher and a student dramatized this development and assumed roles that brought together multiple meaning systems. These systems included both the worlds of the student outside of school and the culture of the classroom as well. Process drama work aided the understanding of how these multiple worlds might interlace in an assessment context and allowed an opportunity to use the frame to question how students’ live experiences outside of school infused their literacy development within school.

As with the previous frames, two propositions served to summarize key elements for studying classroom-based assessment:

1. Classroom-based assessment was a social endeavor in which both students and teacher constructed roles. Dramatization of these roles involved negotiations between stakeholders, and these negotiations may highlight certain assessment practices at the expense of others.

2. Exploring what spaces for self-reflection were created as stakeholders acted out roles and negotiated meaning shifts assessment to the center of instruction rather than something added on in the end. Developing an awareness of these spaces
and allowing students opportunities to voice understandings of their literacy development as part of larger drama of negotiating personal growth led to richer assessment experiences.

Proposition #1 suggested a way to look at whether a teacher's and students' roles shifted over the course of classroom instruction. For example, is the teacher always the director, controlling the flow of the discourse, or does the teacher allow students to direct the assessment drama? Do teachers become actors-collaborators seeking to construct the drama together, or is the teacher's position of power kept intact? Additionally, this proposition encouraged inquiry into how particular roles highlighted certain types of conversations in the context of portfolio-based assessment. A teacher as facilitative director might allow for more exploratory talk for both stakeholders; while a confrontive, directorial stance with a student might discourage honest exploration of their own work and development. In either case, this may lead to concerns about issues of power, gender, and race in the classroom, because, as I have argued throughout this study, identities of individuals are socially constructed around certain ideologies which include these elements.

Due to a review of critical pedagogy, I questioned how relationships of power, gender, and race a play into formulations of resistance as stakeholders negotiate and co-create a culture of assessment. Based on this reading, this next frame of culture and resistance looks more carefully at some of these questions.
Cultural Resistance Frame

To develop a cultural resistance frame, an explanation of 'resistance' is important. The definition posed by McLaren (1989), in an ethnographic study of an inner city school in Toronto, follows:

I have argued that the major drama of resistance in schools is an effort on the part of students to bring their street corner culture into the classroom.... Resistance to school instruction represents a resolve on the part of students not to be dissimulated in the face of oppression; it is a fight against the erasure of their street corner identity. To resist means to fight against the monitoring of passion and desire. (p. 188)

Striking is McLaren’s (1989) characterization of resistance as dramatic and also his recognition of students’ desire to bring their culture into the domains of school. McLaren’s definition resonated with similar work by Freire (1986) and Freire and Macedo (1987). In a dialogue between Freire and Macedo (1987) of the nature of literacy in the United States, Freire added a key notion of language to the nature of resistance, as he explained:

One of the learning tasks of educators who consider themselves progressive (for me “revolutionary” is the preferred term) should be the critical comprehension of different levels of resistance on the part of subordinated classes, that is the levels of their resistance given the levels of confrontation between them and the dominant classes. Understanding these forms of resistance leads you to a better appreciation of their language; and, in fact, you cannot comprehend their resistance without grasping the essence of their language. (p. 137)

Locating resistance in language suggested a concern for how certain voices were silenced while others were allowed to speak. In education, this practice of silencing students and subsequent resistances to silence may be tied to race. From another perspective, Delpit (1988) considered how relationships of culture and power
figured into education of children of color by primarily White school systems. All students, but especially African-American students, must be taught the codes needed to participate fully in the mainstream of American life, not by either focusing on skills or process approaches to learning, but by addressing more fundamental issues of power which permeated American culture. In other words, students in cultures which have been historically marginalized by mainstream education needed to be taught language skills and cognitive processes that would assist them in gaining places of power in society which have been denied them. Delpit's work suggested that some African-American students resisted both process work by well-meaning liberal educators and skills-building approaches because neither provided access to an understanding of power relationships in American culture.

Ogbu (1988), who has studied resistance and its roles in the culture of schooling, developed an ecological framework to argue for alternative strategies to organize institutions of schooling. Like Delpit (1988), he presented evidence that traditional American institutions of schooling have not been interested in creating opportunities for African-Americans to succeed in a predominantly White culture. "To resist being a subordinate minority," Ogbu theorized, African-Americans develop what he calls survival strategies, "which may require knowledge, attitudes, and skills that are not wholly compatible with white middle-class teaching and learning behavior" (p. 241).

Collectively, these theorists posited a view of resistance in education that was centered in dynamic relationships of power between dominant groups and historically
subordinate groups. The relationships dramatized ways issues of race and gender were embedded in a culture of schooling and suggested which groups have access to knowledge that enables them to excel in American education.

For classroom-based assessment, the work of Delpit (1988), Freire (1986), McLaren (1989), and Ogbu (1988) encouraged me to think carefully about student resistance to portfolio assessment and to delve into how such resistance might be attempts to bring their culture into the culture of school. Also, this work fostered inquiry into how race, gender, and power figured into these attempts. Further, key to this inquiry was how notions of culture aligned with the social constructivist assumptions that underlie this study. Critical literacy researcher Willis (1995) argued that social constructivism has not addressed the complexities of culture in its attempts to provide a way to conduct research in teacher education. She suggested that two issues must be addressed for social constructivist perspectives in education to better understand how literacy education might be valid for all students. These were to:

1. make explicit the relationship among culture, language, literacy and power; and
2. train teachers to use cultural information to support and nurture the literacy development for all students who enter their classrooms.
(p. 40)

For classroom-based assessment, which is a significant component in literacy education, the concerns about culture, language, literacy, and power, remained an important focus. Adopting a cultural resistance frame would help me begin to make visible the relationships which Willis believed are important. In summary, two
Propositions are useful to understand how a cultural resistance frame has merit for looking at classroom-based assessment:

1. Resisting practices of classroom-based assessment rather than being viewed as a ‘problem’ may be reconceptualized as strategies which learners use to bridge their world to the culture of school.

2. Strategies of resistance may be connected to race, gender, and perceptions of power in classroom cultures in ways which, if made more apparent, could re-inform teachers’ understandings of how to design more sensitive types of assessments.

Proposition #1 provides a way to begin to articulate a different understanding of portfolios in terms of how learners’ resistance of ownership of them signified issues of power involved in classroom interaction. Also, understanding strategies of resistance as literate activity with their own ‘codes’ and logic could provide ways for teachers to form more equitable assessment relationships with students, leading to more collaborative assessment practices.

Proposition #2 encourages looking at classroom assessment as much more complex than testing the content knowledge of students. Rather, considerations of social identity, including relationships among race, gender, and the ideological tenants of schooling, may be included in ways teachers think about, design, and implement practices of classroom-based assessment. Further, these considerations could suggest that teachers abandon the belief that all students' literacy development can be or should be assessed in the same way. Finally, propositions suggested by a cultural resistance frame created possibilities for looking at dramatizing diversity in classroom-based
assessments. These dramas could involve portfolios as sites wherein students’ diverse backgrounds were enfolded into interactions around assessment rather than excluded from them.

Examining assessment as it was informed by scholarship in cultural resistance, required questioning how teachers’ instructional practices created and maintained positions of power in a classroom. Additionally, because this is a teacher-researcher study, similar questions could be asked about what types of power dynamics were involved in the practices of teacher research. Therefore, the last frame in this study is a teacher-researcher frame, which is developed in the next section by chronicling how teacher research has evolved.

**Teacher Research Frame**

This section, developing the fifth and final frame of teacher-researcher, will present how this frame has developed over the past 10 years, followed by my own research journey.

Myers (1985), in a significant work conceptualizing teacher research, mapped teacher inquiry onto traditional research designs. His approach, designed for writing classrooms, has implications for broader researcher into literacy. Despite Myers’ (1985) intentions to help teachers “analyze writing samples, and the writing process for school or program assessment” (p. 1), his approach was limiting because it aligned teacher-researcher practices with traditional research approaches rather than articulated an alternative view based on how teacher-researchers are contextualized within
classrooms. This limitation was confronted by later work (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Goswami & Stillman, 1987; Kinchloe, 1991; Mohr & Maclean, 1987) which shifted the nature and focus of teacher research.

Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1993), in their text on teacher-research and knowledge, articulated a “working typology” of teacher research (p. 23) by delineating “empirical research” (research journals, oral inquiries, and classroom/school studies) and “conceptual research” (essays). This useful categorization indicated that teacher research was systematic and involved epistemological and methodological decisions by teachers engaged in inquiry ... a distinction significant in that teacher research was a recent development in the qualitative paradigm and that the majority of research on teaching and learning during the last half century positions teachers as an object/recipient of research rather than a director/creator of it. Therefore, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) sought to reconceptualize teacher research as a source of three types of knowledge. (a) Teacher researchers generate knowledge of their own practices in classrooms, especially regarding how teachers and students “co-construct meaning” (p. 44). (b) Teacher researchers generate knowledge for peers in a specific teaching communication, especially how stakeholders “co-construct teaching and learning across contexts” (p. 44). (c) Teacher researchers generate knowledge for a broader forum of educators. This conceptualization of teacher research involved new ways of viewing how relationships among institutional frameworks impacted instruction and research. By focusing on their conception of the epistemological potential of teacher research, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) raised this type of inquiry to a new level, i.e., into
new hegemonic configurations with more traditional forms of educational research so that teacher research becomes a stronger voice in research communities.

Other researchers (Bissex, 1994; Downing et al., 1994) viewed teacher research as a method of seeing and interpreting the culture of a classroom. This assumed that classroom cultures were dynamic and constructed by interactions among the practices and meaning systems of stakeholders. Coupled with this assumption was a view that, as stakeholders within classroom cultures, teacher researchers were increasing dissatisfied with ‘objective’ portrayals which traditional positivist researchers have offered of their practices. Such dissatisfaction led to what Downing et al. (1994) argued was a shift toward a “cultural understanding” of teaching which embraced social, political, and historical issues which previous research sought to exclude. From this perspective, belief systems, pedagogic decisions, and curricular agendas became sociocultural systems of meaning which required examination as part of the larger configuration of classroom culture. Bissex (1994) argued powerfully for examining these systems:

We look at our knowledge, our assumptions, our interpretations as our practice renders them tangible, as re-searching makes them visible, and as critical consciousness opens them to questioning. What we see then are not merely faces or voices or events but meanings which reform our practice. (p. 103)

Central to Bissex’s vision of teacher research was its value for transforming teachers’ practices while widening understandings of the complexities of student-teacher interactions. His arguments echoed prior researchers (Goswami & Stillman, 1987; Stenhouse, 1985) who characterized teacher research as systematic, reflective
inquiry into the nature of teaching by practitioners. From such inquiry, shifts in pedagogy may have taken place as a teacher became empowered to alter instructional practices from knowledge generated by his own explorations.

Shifts in knowledge of classrooms and teaching practices through teacher research were not neutral, value-free enterprises. Rather, its unique perspective on teaching and learning was provided by how classroom research by teachers was situated and informed by issues of power, gender, and ideology. Scholars and researchers (Berlin, 1990; Britzman, 1995; Fleischer, 1994; McWilliam, 1994; Pappas, 1995; Ray, 1990) have begun to explore how these issues contextualized and challenged teacher research. In his argument for teacher research as a potentially “new model for the teaching profession” (p. 3), Berlin (1990) claimed that the power of teacher research studies lay in its democratic tendencies, including a shift toward dialogue between researcher and subjects at the center of methodological practices. From such shifts, he believed:

The teacher-as-researcher concept displays the potential to become a revolutionary force in schooling. It is changing the consciousness of teachers, making them aware of a democratic and empowering response of their victimization by social, political, and cultural forces. (p. 10)

Berlin’s hopes for teacher research were influenced by Freire (1986), Arnowitz and Giroux (1985), Shor (1986), and other critical theorists, from which he believed that a missing element of teacher research had been their collective call to critical consciousness to interrogate traditional educational practices along political lines.
From a composition studies perspective, Ray (1990) recognized the value of Berlin’s (1990) arguments and campaigned for new concepts of teacher research informed by feminist theory by pointing out the problematic position of juxtaposing teacher research to more traditional research and claiming the former’s ‘superiority’:

Teacher researchers are placed in the difficult position of having to argue that their form of inquiry is superior to that of established methods. This is one reason why teacher research has not significantly affected knowledge making in education and composition studies. Devaluing the scientific method is not the most effective way to legitimize teacher research. Teacher researchers would gain more by arguing for the necessity of broader definitions of ‘research,’ encouraging alternative forms of inquiry, and opening up the province of research to other inquirers. (p. 53)

Ray’s (1990) call for enlarging the definitions of what constituted research and opening up the terrain of research resonated with Berlin’s (1990) hope for teacher research as a democratizing enterprise. Both authors believed that teacher research had the potential for breaking down traditional hierarchies of researcher-to-subject and displacing them with forms of inquiry which allowed voices of stakeholders to be heard in different ways.

To create space for those voices, critical self-reflection on the practices and processes of teacher research was salient. This was particularly important as practitioners of this form of inquiry advocated for its potential as a method of knowing about schools, classrooms, students, and learning. Chronicling her own development as a teacher researcher, Fleischer (1994) scrutinized the cultural forces and theoretic influences shaping her identity and practices. From this retrospective analysis of her
own work, she advocated “collaborative teacher-student research” that concerned “an ongoing look into what makes a particular classroom work as it does” (p. 119).

From a feminist, postpositivist perspective, McWilliam (1994) sought to tell a different teacher education story in which new research practices moved beyond connecting theory with practice and began examining the nature of power relations in the socialization of teachers. She believed, “while constrained as institutionally constituted subjects, teachers do have agency to change what happens in their classrooms as it transpires” (p. 30). Teacher research as an agency for change must pay attention to “the ‘broken and breaking’ images of language as it actively constitutes and transforms the social world” (p. 30). Stated differently, teacher researchers needed to scrutinize what was pedagogically fragmented, incomplete, unsuccessful, and ill-formed in their classrooms and to consider how these practices were related to institutional issues of power and gender.

Similarly, Britzman (1995) questioned how teachers’ identities were culturally and politically constituted by discourses and practices of education, i.e., teacher identity was dynamic and shifting as opposed to essentialist and static. The challenge for teacher researchers was to examine the ‘voices’ and epistemological configurations that constructed teacher identities and how those identities shaped instruction.

Pappas (1995), reporting on significant concerns and issues emerging from a discussion group about teacher research, identified a centrality for new configurations of power for teacher research and its relationship with larger research communities:
Adopting a constructivist stance to teachers’ knowledge, assuming that teachers have the authority to know, means that university educators must find ways to share power with them in both teaching and research. (p. 159).

Pappas’ (1995) linking ways of knowing with new ways of sharing power, echoed previous critiques of classroom teacher researcher or university researcher work cited above and challenged both groups to explore relationships which resituated traditional relationships of inquiry.

The shifts in teacher research from a mode of inquiry which tried to emulate traditional research practices to a postpositivist, democratizing enterprise exemplified by this selective review of research, were analogous to my own teacher researcher journey in the present study. Initially, even though this study was conceived as a teacher researcher project, my views of inquiry were linear and tied to my own understandings of what it meant to ‘do research.’ Beginning to collect data, I assumed that I would gather documents, conduct interviews, and make videotapes of subjects in a straightforward manner. My own agendas, practices, and institutional allegiances would shape and reshape my interpretation of these data and remain cloaked behind my vision of ‘the product’ which I hoped to complete. Over the course of the study, however, I shifted my focus from creating a research ‘product’ to the complexities of the research ‘process’ in a classroom, a shift which came about from actually examining and in a sense ‘living with’ the data I was collecting and simultaneously developing frames to make sense of what I was viewing. The frames functioned recursively in that, when I began interpreting student-teacher interactions and the
dynamics of the classroom culture, a further analysis of my initial purposes for the study was required. For example, in my research log which I kept from the first day of class throughout the course of the study, I wrote:

I felt like things went fairly well. I like writing the first day. The students were reasonably cooperative. Two girls wrote a note to each other while we were doing the letter response. Was this literacy resisting literacy or writing to augment literacy? (Journal, 8/31/94)

Speculating on possible interpretations, I am nonetheless attempting to match the behavior to literacy theory as an 'either/or relationship.' In retrospect, I discount resistance or augmentation, but, focusing on getting a product, I was quick to label what I saw. Gradually, the data began to inform my awareness of processes, and an awareness of the culture of the classroom emerged:

I need to collect the portfolio data. This must be written up this weekend. I originally thought that I made a mistake choosing this class, but I have been revising my opinion. I need to pay attention to how I revise my opinion as the culture unfolds or is constructed. (Journal, 9/16/94)

Important here is that I recognized the significance of revising my feelings about the class its part of the creation of the classroom culture. My becoming aware of 'how' I see being as important as 'what' I see is evident from the following December entry (three months into the study):

I've got to get the kids back into the project before much more gets away from me. Who will be the final case studies? Tammy would be interesting. She seems to trust me. Sean would be interesting, too. He draws a lot. How does his part play into his writing? I'm not sure how all the documents I'm collecting will work. It's like the site is the space between the portfolio as a physical entity and the conference. The site shifts and is reconstituted each time I sit down with a student. I need to
get more on tape. So much has happened since this class started. (Journal, 12/12/94)

In this selection, I realized that, critical to the research was the students' investment and trust, and I began to articulate limitations of trying to capture the culture of a classroom in this study. Also, data were causing me to speculate about assessment and portfolios rather than matching data to preexisting theory.

In retrospect, my own shifts as a teacher researcher were influenced both by previous research and the practices of conducting inquiry. Previous teacher researchers helped widen my notions of classroom-based research and encouraged me to reconceptualize my relationships with stakeholders in the study. Teaching and researching my own classroom challenged my collection of data on assessment systematically while simultaneously increasing my awareness of how my own views, assumptions, and pedagogy-shaped research processes.

Summary

Together, these five frames — semiotic, social drama, critical discourse, cultural resistance, and teacher research — create a multiperspectival examination of classroom assessment. Bringing these perspectives to bear on the data enabled me to better represent the complex interrelationships among meaning systems which characterized a culture of assessment. Rather than offer a simplified reductionistic version of this culture, I constructed a multilayered, textured account of the dramatization of social processes of assessment as they brought to the fore issues of
power, race, and gender in a classroom. Table 1 shows relationships among frames for viewing classroom-based assessment data, and Figure 1 shows the potential for viewing assessment through multiple lenses.
Table 1
Relationships Among Frames for Viewing Classroom-Based Assessment Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context of Classroom Case Studies</th>
<th>Complexities of Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frames</td>
<td>Features of portfolio-based assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Semiotic</td>
<td>Interplay of personal meaning systems within &amp; against discursive practices of schooling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Con{text} as another text shaping other tests produced in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Discourse</td>
<td>Genres of assessment embedded in larger discourses of school and community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ideological allegiances of stakeholders reflected in language of assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Drama</td>
<td>Dramatic nature of portfolio-based assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple levels of engagement among stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture of Resistance</td>
<td>Reconceptualization of practices viewed as &quot;problems&quot; to transitions and strengths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased understanding of how resistance is informed by race, gender, and power issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-Researcher</td>
<td>Blurring traditional lines between teacher and researcher, opening new ways of knowing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Potentially shifting traditional configurations of power.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This next chapter presents a brief description of the research site, the type of data, data collection methodology, analysis of the data, and ethical issues.
CHAPTER 3
TOWARD MY EXAMINING A CULTURE OF ASSESSMENT

Introduction

This teacher research study involved ongoing negotiation and renegotiation of the roles of researcher and teacher in my own classroom. Trying to simultaneously adopt both views was difficult and often frustrating, but it was an essential, interactive method of generating new ways of knowing the complexities of classroom-based assessment. On one hand, as the classroom teacher, I was asked to control the flow of the class, give assignments addressing reading and writing, create tests, average grades, and report results to parents; however, as researcher, consideration was given to how a culture of learning and practices of assessment were constructed within the classroom both within, against, and despite these professional and curricular expectations. Conducting research in a classroom, in which purposes were both instructionally and research driven, provided insights into how the role as the teacher impacted data collection and allowed for ongoing examination of teaching practices. In their work on teacher research, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) called this “knowing one’s own knowledge” (p. 45) and argued:

Essentially, teachers and students negotiate what counts as knowledge in the classroom, who can have knowledge, and how knowledge can be
generated, challenged and evaluated. We are arguing here that through inquiry, teachers come to understand how this happens in their own classrooms and how interpretations of classroom events are shaped. (p. 45)

This knowledge was different from more traditional research studies because of the full-participant relationship (Wagner, 1993) enjoyed in the present study. Although inquiry was systematic, I was in no way a disinterested observer ... how students excel in a classroom was of importance. Also, I was in position of power by controlling the classroom, setting the norms and requirements, creating the direction of instruction, evaluating students' performances, and assigning grades. Further, my own background influenced how both the personas of teacher and researcher which were constructed in the classroom.

Lather (1991), in her exploration of research methodology within feminist and post-modernist perspectives, suggested the importance of acknowledging that ways of knowing were inherently "culture-bound and perspectival," thus, "the necessity of self-reflexivity, of growing awareness of how researcher values permeate inquiry" (p. 2). In the present study, the frame through the classroom was viewed was constructed both by ideological and cultural biases of the researcher and the interactions among the students and the researcher as teacher-researcher. Part of this study, then, was to interrogate how this frame shaped the collection and interpretation of the data. From this process emerged a clearer understanding of how perception is influenced by who one is and where one conducts inquiry.
Finally, the blending of the roles of teacher and researcher complicated data collection, because it became impossible to collect the data in a precisely linear fashion. Data collection was interrupted and redirected by the responsibilities of classroom teaching. However, the complications of this facet of the research process and its recursive and tangential character provided opportunities to view in new ways the classroom interaction as it pertained to assessment. These included insights into how students resisted assessment practices and reshaped them for their own purposes, as well as a sense of how the language used in a classroom to discuss assessment influenced and constructed subsequent assessment practices.

Mediating between these roles was the practice of reflecting on classroom and research experiences, which served to problematize both the role of teacher and researcher, because the line between the two became blurred. How much of research is teaching? When was the teacher researching? Ultimately, these questions led to a reconceptualization of teacher-research in the context of exploring the complexities of classroom-based assessment. However, in this teacher-researcher study, I constructed case studies of both individual students and of my own role as teacher. In a sense, I serve as another case study because I interrogated my own agendas and biases. Therefore, the primary method was a case study approach. Some significant work in case study research is presented in this next section.
Case Study Research

For the purposes of this study, Stake’s (1995) broad definition was adopted, wherein he said that “case study is the study of particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). Stakes’ emphasis of a single case’s complexity was useful for this study because it forced examination of how multiple meaning systems interlaced in complex ways as individual students negotiated a culture of assessment in a language arts classroom. Attempting to understand the nature of these complexities and how they figured into constructions of assessment practices led to case studies of four students in an attempt to reconstruct the particularity of each learner. Particularity refers to ways individual learners draw on personal meaning systems as they interact with a culture of schooling and co-create assessment practices in a classroom. A case-study approach enabled better understanding of these interactions and how they played out in a classroom setting.

In tracing the disciplinary roots of case study research in education, Stenhouse (1985) situated it in the traditions of history and ethnography, believing that a historian, assuming a shared understanding of human behavior deals in the foreground of action. An ethnographer “works to call into question the ‘commonplace’ of cultures and seeks to question rather than build on their taken-for-grantedness” (p. 53). While he argued that distinguishing clearly between these two was problematic, Stenhouse (1985) believed that case studies have enormous value because classroom-based researchers examined their own practices ongoingly as part of their pedagogies:

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Such a pedagogy would suggest patterns of classroom action that enable the pursuit of educational aims to be a means of capturing an understanding of educational process. In short, the possibility of studying one’s own case as one lives it may be built on our case-study tradition to the extent that the objectives of education can be fused into action. (p. 55)

Stenhouse’s (1985) focus on the potential of case study work to capture some understanding of educational process was significant. By interrogating the processes of education and literacy acquisition within and across cases, it was possible to gain a clearer understanding of learners’ roles in socially constructing knowledge in classrooms.

Focusing on social constructions of knowledge places the present study’s methods in a constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Briefly, a constructivist perspective assumed (a) an existence of multiple, socially-constructed realities; (b) an “interlocking” of the researcher and the researched which necessitated a co-creation of the inquiry process; and (c) a “hermeneutic methodology” which was recursive and leads to collaborative accounts of case (p. 84). If case study work were viewed as interactive and collaborative, teacher researchers were positioned to reconstruct sociocultural processes which overlap as stakeholders negotiated learning. Arguing for a compatibility of case study approaches within teacher research projects, Bissex (1990) situated her claims within a constructivist frame:

A case study I see as a reflective story of the unfolding over time of a series of events involving particular individuals. The person’s studies are regarded as full human beings, having intentions, and making meanings, not merely ‘behaving.’ The researcher includes these intentions and meanings in the meaning that she makes of the story, and as interpreter if not also actor, is herself a character in it. (p. 71)
In the researcher's study of a culture of assessment, the cases presented are "reflective stories" so that processes of the students are included in my accounts of assessment negotiations. Inquiring into student processes necessitated examining my own processes as a teacher-researcher. Through this self-reflection, emerged a more complete image of shifting research roles and practices over the course of this study. Schon (1987, 1991) called this "the reflective turn" (p. 5) and stated, "It makes research into a reflective practice in its own right, posing a set of questions – in some instances, dilemmas – that researchers avoid at their own peril" (p. 9). This selected body of case study work cited above encouraged speculation on the potential of constructing case studies within a teacher-researcher study. Such an approach would foreground individual case stories of learners within teacher-researcher ways of knowing about classrooms. Such a frame, as do all frames, created particular ways of seeing and interpreting social interactions. Additionally, it also allowed for reflection on the processes of frame-building.

Data Sources

The site of this study was an urban high school in a large district in a Midwestern city, herein fictitiously called Middlebrook. From a document on file in the school building by an anonymous author, partial history of the research site could be constructed. The original plans for this school were drawn up in 1951, and the
actual work on the school started in 1952. Although the school opened in the fall of 1953, the building was not yet complete:

The first time the students met in the auditorium for an assembly, there were no seats and the stage was not finished so the students stood on the bare cement and listened to the principal address them from a keg of nails which he stood on in order that everyone could see and hear him. (Taken from document on file in the school building.)

The school was finished in 1954 and opened its doors to house 650 students in grades 7-12. During its history, the school has changed from educating students in grades 7-12, to grades 8-12, to grades 9-12, and to its configuration at the time of this study of grades 10-12. The first graduating class in 1955 had 44 students. At the time of this study, the student population was approximately 900, with 50% of these being African-American and 50% being from a European background. The school had approximately 50 teachers and offered the standard curriculum defined by the school system. The school supported an active sports program and formed alliances with local businesses which supported a variety of endeavors within the building. The veteran teaching staff included several teachers with over 15 years’ experience.

The data collection, from multiple perspectives, was begun on the first day in a 9-th grade English class ... inasmuch as this class was followed by a conference period, there would be time and opportunity to reflect on the data collection as well as begin preliminary, ongoing analyses. Twenty-eight students were enrolled in the class, 15 of whom were African-American and 13 of whom were of European background. In an effort to capture the decision-making processes and shape the negotiation (or lack of negotiation) as the boundaries of the class were defined, I audiotaped daily instruction
as the first few days of school unfolded. This audiotaping took place systematically over two weeks and seemed least obtrusive to the construction and development of the culture of the classroom. Additionally, audiotaping took place at selected points during the school year as a way to track shifts in the discourse of classroom interaction. For example, audiotaping the class the day after statewide proficiency testing allowed an opportunity to explore how the practices of testing may have impacted classroom interaction.

As the school year progressed, four students were selected as the sample for my conducting exploratory case studies, through which I hoped to uncover student views and understandings of assessment and its relationships to their literacy acquisition. These cases were selected on their “confirming and disconfirming” nature (Patton, 1990). As my own beliefs and agendas about assessment interacted with the students’ views and meaning systems surrounding assessment, I selected students who both elaborated and challenged my views about portfolios and their purpose in a classroom-based assessment system; the variation among the cases seemed likely to provide data that would push my own conceptualizations in new directions. To construct the case studies, I collected data from four different sources, looking first at the portfolio from their 8th-grade year, with each student keeping a self-selected portfolio of work from the class over the school year. An integral part of the portfolio is the conferences the students and I conducted throughout the school year, which took place during regular instructional time and were videotaped by other students in the class. Second, I conducted systematic interviews with each case-study subject in order to (a) gather
biographical information, and (b) inquire into their views on assessment and how they perceived themselves as readers and writers. Third, each student’s parents/caregivers completed a short survey to collect data concerning their views on the quality of education their child was receiving, their views on assessment, and how their awareness of activities outside school might impact their student’s literacy development. Fourth, case study students viewed videotaped portfolio conferences between me and non-case study students. Observations would serve both as a form of member-checking and to deepen my understanding of these students’ views on assessment. Through weaving these data into a single case, I hoped to delve into how multiple meaning systems were mobilized as learners negotiated a culture of assessment.

To provide contrasting perspectives to my own assessment practices, I separately interviewed and audiotaped five other English faculty members concerning their views on assessment and how they managed assessment as part of their pedagogical practices. This effort would provide a sense of the breadth of assessment practices and a fuller understanding about the culture of teaching and assessment.

Keeping a research journal over the school year provided me an opportunity to reflect, question, complain about, celebrate, explain, and criticize my own practices and decisions during the course of this study. This journal, originally planned as a chronicle of my experiences over the duration of data collection, forced a confrontation of my own ideological and political agendas as a teacher and how they were shaping my research. Reviewing this journal through the frame which emerged from the
classroom and case study data provided insight into how my own social and institutional identity affects the way I structure assessment practices in a classroom.

Table 2 indicates sources, types, and duration of data collected and the type of analyses utilized.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portfolios</td>
<td>Classroom work, student-teacher interaction</td>
<td>Ongoing during study</td>
<td>Comparisons within &amp; across case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audiotapes</td>
<td>Language of classroom culture</td>
<td>First 2 weeks, then selectively over the year</td>
<td>Language and structure of the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videotapes</td>
<td>Recordings of portfolio conferences</td>
<td>Selectively over the school year</td>
<td>Comparisons within &amp; across case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student interviews</td>
<td>Perspectives on learning, classroom assessment practices</td>
<td>Twice each grading period</td>
<td>Woven into case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent interviews</td>
<td>Parents' views on learning, assessment</td>
<td>Survey with follow-up telephone interview</td>
<td>Woven into case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty interviews</td>
<td>Contrasting perspectives on classroom assessment</td>
<td>Over the school year</td>
<td>Comparisons across individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research log</td>
<td>Reflections on research process</td>
<td>Ongoing throughout the study</td>
<td>Chronicle my own development in the study</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analysis**

This next section details how the above-described frame were utilized to view the drama of assessment and make sense of the complexities of the classroom culture. The overarching nature of the analysis of these data is emergent and constructive. Although my identity as a classroom teacher included certain philosophical and
ideological assumptions, how I viewed and interacted with data continued to shift as I progressed through the study. There were recursive characteristics to this process ... as new interviews were conducted, additional classroom discourse was transcribed, other portfolios are collected, and new constructions and reinterpretations of perspectives emerged. For example, initial audiotaping was viewed with a metaphorical wide semiotic lens, with events questioned as to how meaning was constructed and negotiated. However, as data collection continued, the dramatic nature of interactions among the students in the classroom and me became apparent. This theme of social drama emerged from these data and reinforced my understanding of classroom interaction. Guba and Lincoln (1989) referred to this as a “hermeneutic dialectic circle” (p. 152):

As the several constructions begin to take shape, however, certain elements will seem to be more salient than others (and will probably first appear this way to the inquirer). This salience will emerge as a result of increased mention by respondents and participants, for example, because of the vehemence with which stakeholding groups discuss and issue, because of funder’s interests, or for any other reason that seems important in the context. (p. 153).

This notion of “emerging salience” as a part of the process of data analysis was useful in explaining my own transition from analyzing classroom discourse to constructing case studies. In my journey from considering classroom talk to focusing on selected students (two other salient themes), the critical nature of classroom discourse and resistance to certain assessment practices emerged. Critical discourse, as characterized by Luke (1995):
... can tell us a great deal about how schools and classrooms build 'success' and 'failure' and about how teachers' and students' spoken and written texts shape and construct policies and rules, knowledge and indeed versions' of successful and failing students. (p. 11)

In the present study, critically analyzing how stakeholders' texts (spoken and written) construct classroom assessment enabled me to better understand how these texts draw from an array of discourses, including students' worlds outside of school, and the larger culture of schooling itself. These discourses, Luke (1995) explained, were “dynamic and cross-fertilizing, continually relocated and regenerated in everyday texts” (p. 15). From a critical discourse frame, focusing on a portfolio as a site where the ‘everyday texts’ of the classroom were collected enabled a clearer sense of ways which multiple discourses or meaning systems intermeshed in the practices of classroom-based assessment. During this process, the theme of resistance as a strategy which stakeholders employed within dramas of assessment also emerged; I then refocused my analysis by using it as a frame from which to view the study. This process of ‘recursive circularity,’ in which themes emerged from data collected from interactions among stakeholders and then are reemployed as frames to interpret the data, aligned methods of analysis within the larger constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Figure 2 expresses my attempt to capture a sense of emergence and reflexivity that is a key part of the analysis. The nature of analysis is indicated as non-linear and exploratory, because the direction of interpretation circles back and reemerges through the course of the study. This approach allows for multiple perspectives of stakeholders
to be both acknowledged and enfolded into the analysis of the data. As result, although all stakeholders were not completely involved in all facets on the study, some collaboration and co-interpretation was achieved.

Figure 2
Recursive Circularity
However, achieving some collaboration among stakeholders inevitably involves issues of research ethics, so in this last section, issues of ethics are addressed and how they are embedded in the relationships among stakeholders.

**Ethical Issues**

In all research studies, there are ethical concerns for all the stakeholders; this study is no different. From the onset, a primary goal was to acknowledge and represent multiple perspectives. Requiring complete honesty and clear explication of research purposes for stakeholders, this is often not an easy process. Lincoln (1990), in an essay critiquing ethical issues in qualitative research, commented on the importance of this goal:

It is subversive to the research effort to search for the multiple social constructions that individuals hold and, at the same time, deceive them regarding the purposes of the research. It leaves respondents, at best confused, and, at worst, unable to make informed consent decisions or to act in what they might consider their own best interests under the law or under their own human dignity. (p. 280)

Collecting data from the first day of school necessitated telling the students, at the onset of the study, of (a) the purposes of the study, (b) the nature of the research, i.e., classroom assessment, and (c) the importance of tape recording for accuracy. Students were assured that the taping would remain private, used only for the purposes of the study, and would not be exploited against them as a source of embarrassment.

Being in a position of power as a teacher and in a position of inquiry as a researcher meant my having to create a delicate atmosphere of trust, which, existing in
an instructional context, must be renegotiated with stakeholders in a research setting.

Concerning the ethics of case study research, Simons (1989) argued:

> Those writing about ethics often refer to the 'trust' that is important in research, the 'integrity of the researcher,' or 'respect' to be shown for individuals as though these virtues were separable from research practice. (p. 122)

Simons admonished that ethical practice was more than acknowledging concepts; rather, "trust has to be won, not assumed" (p. 122). For the present study, this was a particularly important issue. Although trust had been solidified with the students, the level of trust had to be reestablished for meaningful data collection from the parents. A new layer of confidentiality concerns had to be addressed, i.e., assurances of motives and purposes. A letter, which outlined the study and students' role in the study, was sent home to parents for permission to include their child, asking them to complete a survey about their feelings on assessment and inquiring into the possibility of a follow-up telephone interview. This letter further reaffirmed a commitment to confidentiality by assuring that real names would not be used in the text of the study.

Another ethical concern emerged when one of the students, 'Sam,' expressed concern about his grades. Would I reveal to his parents that his work and efforts in the class were not necessarily his best? Inquiry into classroom assessment practices brings additional ethical concerns to the fore for a teacher-researcher, because problematic in such a situation is influence imposed on students. As a teacher-researcher, how do instructional practices shape and even limit students' perceptions of themselves as
learners? Other researchers have raised this issue, namely Torrence (1989), who drew from earlier work of Barnes:

Also, of course, with regard to ethics, one’s potential impact on the lives of subjects of one’s research is as important a consideration as the more technical concern of monitoring one’s impact on the data collected. This is particularly the case when studying assessment. (p. 177)

These concerns of how decisions, questions, pedagogy, and epistemology refracted the assessment data in a classroom context were paramount for this study and will be treated in the next chapter as the context of the classroom as a data source. Rather than separate the context of the study from the data, the context became another source of data which foregrounded and interacted with all other sets.

In this way, the frames of semiotics, social drama, critical discourse, and culture and resistance which were earlier outlined can be viewed, emerging and ‘thickening,’ first on a classroom level and then on an individual case level. By thickening, it is meant that the constructs of the frames as they have been portrayed gain a type of value as they are brought to bear on empirical data. Returning to Guba and Lincoln’s (1989) articulation of meaningful criteria in a constructivist paradigm, this gives ‘credibility’ to this study. From their perspective:

The credibility criterion is parallel to internal validity in that the idea of isomorphism between findings and an objective reality is replaced by isomorphism between constructed realities of respondents and the reconstructions attributed to them. (p. 237)

The type of credibility to which Guba and Lincoln (1989) refer is what I attempted to achieve in my study. By using multiple frames to analyze and interpret my perspective and the perspectives of students, their parents, and other teachers, I
articulated complex relationships among multiple meaning systems and how they affected the practices and interactions of classroom assessment. Instead of seeking to represent 'truth,' my goal was to present configurations of constructed realities which characterized a culture of assessment in one 9th-grade classroom. This goal assumed that these constructions were incomplete due to their dynamic nature. Yet, attempting to capture their dynamic quality by avoiding being overly reductionistic, as much as possible, is the challenge of constructivist research.

This next chapter presents the classroom context as a data source and brings the frames earlier developed to bear on these data to show how layers of meaning within social drama, relationships of power, and issues of gender and race contributed to the construction of a culture of assessment.
CHAPTER 4
EXAMINING THE CONTEXT OF THE CLASSROOM

Introduction

In his essay, “Discourse on the Novel,” Bakhtin (1981) made the following assertion:

Form and content in discourse are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon-social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its factors, from sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning. (p. 259)

From this perspective, the social context of a classroom in which language is produced is as important to the meaning as a ‘text’ itself. In fact, both could be considered texts, as they are collections of signs. This fits with the multiple frame developed earlier in this study because, in any given social context, multiple texts compete simultaneously as meaning dramatized by stakeholders. Halliday (1985), writing about a semiotic perspective, characterized texts as “a form of exchange” which we need to consider in their “process aspect as an interactive event, a social exchange of meanings” (p. 11). Taken together, these two statements suggest that texts, both oral and written, constructed by students and teachers in a classroom, are bound up in the socially-constructed structures of the classroom, and that structures influence how meaning is articulated, acknowledged, and evaluated. Therefore, the physical structure
of the classroom, my own expectations of student behavior and achievement as classroom teacher, the language I used when interacting with students, as well as the students' expectations and language when interacting with me and each other, created a context for interpretation of meaning.

From a research perspective, the context in which the data were collected became another set of data which influenced all other sets. For example, the classroom culture may have created opportunities for some students to open up and explore their own learning practices in portfolio conferences. Conversely, other students might have felt constrained by that same classroom environment. Because context exerts such a powerful influence on meaning, it became important to describe that context in some detail. Such a description would provide insight into how my classroom practices, together with the interactions of the students, shaped the possibilities for teaching, research, and learning in my classroom.

This section recounts an interpretive description of the 9th-grade classroom in which this study was conducted, viewed through the frames I have developed. For this interpretation, a variety of media contributed to the data: transcripts of tape recordings of the first two weeks of class, transcript of tape recordings later in the school year, my own lesson plans, and selected entries from my research journal. This description began to show my interpretive role as the teacher-researcher in construction of the overall classroom culture and suggested configurations of power dynamics and other issues that impacted a culture of assessment within that classroom.
Exploring Classroom Culture

My Bachelor of Arts degree was in English; I took an M.A.T. in composition and rhetoric and was hired in an urban school district to teach writing. However, I soon realized that my interests were, in reality, much larger. I discovered that my work was about literacy and how students used meaning-making strategies to make sense of their worlds. This led to an increasing interest in professional development and reading research to inform my teaching practices. Soon I began to take courses at The Ohio State University and realized that I wanted a Ph.D. in Education so that I might be trained to do research in schools with students.

During a recent year-long sabbatical, I had immersed myself in educational scholarship and research methodology as part of my residency for a Ph.D. in Education. That immersion convinced me of the importance of creating space for student voices in a classroom setting, i.e., opportunities for students to contribute to the culture of learning by expressing their opinions and interests openly and to have those opinions heeded by their peers and teacher. Further, I hoped to work with students to weave those opinions and interests into educational practices that constituted the work of the class.

Returning from sabbatical, I was assigned to an urban, performing arts high school ... coincidentally, the same high school at which I had starting my teaching profession in 1987. I faced my 9th-grade English class with excitement, nervousness, and, due to my increased level of experience, a sense of confidence, nonetheless aware
that the students would present new challenges. My professional identity as a teacher had to be reestablished, and my image was paramount. At the conclusion of Day #1, the following journal entry was made:

I felt like things went fairly well. I liked writing the first day. The students were reasonably cooperative. Two girls wrote a note to each other while we were doing the letter response. Was this literacy resisting literacy or writing against literacy? Witnessed it, but I really didn't respond to it. (Journal, 8/31/95)

A tension existed between my sense of my self as the teacher and the sense of my self as the researcher. Students were at first “reasonably cooperative” and then writing notes during an assignment. Implicit in this juxtaposition was that the students were doing something other than their assignment. However, speculation as to their motives echoed work in critical literacy studies inherent in my phrase, ‘literacy resisting literacy.’ [See Freire & Macedo (1987) and McLaren (1986) for examples.] The use of the word ‘witnessed’ from the above Journal entry suggests seeing something not right in legal sense, a crime. It appears that, in defining my role as teacher, I was concerned about students being on task.

From the first day, I imagined my classroom as a student-centered forum for the exploration of ideas and beliefs through collaborative interaction. I wanted students to feel safe in articulating their ideas, and I wanted to encourage acceptance of diverse perspectives. I hoped to embed these goals in the process of literacy acquisition and journey toward those goals through speaking, reading, and writing. From the beginning of the school year, I wanted to treat students fairly. My expectations were expressed as follows:
It seems to me that one of the things that we want to do is, we want to become a community of learners. There are some things we need to be able to do to be able to achieve that. The first thing we need to do is respect each other. You are all individuals; you bring different strengths to this class. I will respect you. In return, I'll ask you to respect me and I'll also ask you to respect each other, and that means real simple things like when I talk, you listen. When you talk, we'll listen. (Transcript, 8/31/95)

From the onset, it seems that I was trying to create a 'learning community' with some reciprocity, i.e., 'I'll respect you; in return, I'll ask you to respect me.' Also, I acknowledged their individuality and the strengths I imagined they brought to the class.

The concept of community was important to me:

Now there are rules that we have to live by. All communities have rules. Don't cross when the light is red; stop at stop signs. Don't litter. We're a community, too, so these are going to be our rules and you'll recognize all of them because they're the rules that the school asks me to enforce pretty much. No hall passes unless there's an emergency. Don't come in here an ask me for a hall pass. You guys are young adults. You go to the rest room; you get drinks of water. You take care of your personal business before you come in my class. We need every minute in here to get the things done that we're going to get done this year. We've got so much to do. It's exciting, but we need all of us together. If one person is absent, that means one less voice, one less perspective, one less imagination. That hurts us. So we need everyone here so we can be a successful group. I can't have pop in this class. One thing that happens it gets spilt and the crumbs get on the floor and then the ants come and the ants are followed by the roaches ...

S. They're in here anyway. (Transcript, 8/31/95)

From these two selections of transcript, insights emerged about how the learning community was structured and who was involved in this structuring process.

First, it was important to consider the interplay of various systems of meaning: (a) expectations and sense of myself as the classroom teacher and the researcher beginning.
data collection in my own classroom; (b) students’ expectations as 9th-graders (with some exceptions) coming into high school English for the first time ... these expectations were shaped by their own educational history and school experiences; and (c) the expectations of the school as an institution ... these expectations were both explicit (school rules printed in a student handbook) and implicit (social relationships and practices of being a high school student). From a semiotic perspective, there seemed to be dissonance between statements about ‘creating a community of learners’ and dictating the ‘rules of the community’ which the school asks me to enforce. Generally, communities develop from participants working together to construct rules and plans for accomplishing goals. In this way, individuals invest in the community as they become a part of it. From the discourse presented above, decisions had apparently been made as to what the ‘rules will be’ without giving students an opportunity for input. Also, by listing its rules, the community is presumed to be already in place.

Reviewing this first day’s transcript revealed a surprising amount of control on my part over the classroom discourse, i.e., setting the rules, calling on students, deciding on topics to be discussed, and rewarding certain comments with approval. There was little space for students to enter into a dialogue by asking questions or making choices about how we might manage the classroom together. One interpretation: as a teacher in actual practice and socialization into the teaching profession, perhaps I was unable to relinquish control of the classroom to create a student-centered learning environment analogous to the one I aspired to in my own thinking. This was only one factor, in that the situation was more complex. Another
interpretation: a logonomic system, which Hodge and Kress (1988) explained as systems that “constrain social behavior through rules prescribing behavior” (p. 266) impacted teacher-student interaction. Additionally, these systems govern “who is able/forbidden to produce or receive what meanings under what circumstances and in what codes” (p. 266). From a constructivist perspective, the institution of a school, which both the students and teachers have been socialized into, functioned as a logonomic system which defined the traditional codes and structures of teacher-to-student relationships, yet also constrained them ... resulting in a one-sided discourse. Students may have expected the teacher on the first day of school to define for them the parameters and rules of the class and were therefore reluctant to enter into a dialogue. In the same way, this logonomic system of schooling may direct teachers’ own interactions and comments to the students so that they assume the traditional ‘in front of the class’ roles.

Therefore, the meaning system of educational theory ascribed to as a result of my doctoral work could be viewed as competing with the logonomic system of schooling that produced the ‘first day expectations.’ Also, the students’ own personal meaning systems governed how they viewed/resisted initial attempts to create a ‘community of learners.’ This relationship could be viewed as that of actors, moving in and out of the culture of schooling as both students and teacher attempted to negotiate their stance within the power dynamics that accompanied structures of education (Tierney, 1994).
Anthropologist Turner (1974, 1979) explored the interaction of dramatic and ritual performance and the dynamics of culture by linking dramatic performance and sociocultural processes — roles consisted of “collective representations shared by actors and audience, who are usually members of the same culture” (p. 85). In a similar fashion, both the students and teachers are members of a shared culture, the classroom, which they construct as they move in and out of roles. Studying the relationship between cognition and drama, Courtney (1990) proposed that “dramatic worlds can operate only in the contexts available to them” (p. 64). Courtney implicitly argued that participants/actors constructed, through their practices, a context within which their drama unfolded. Analogously, teachers/learners, constructed, through their practices, a context in which learning and interactions unfolded. In both drama and learning, the quality of the experience was partially linked to how much meaning systems were opened up or constrained. Using drama as a metaphor to characterize classroom interaction within a social semiotic frame suggested the importance of exploring how assuming roles within overlapping meaning systems influenced the negotiation of classroom culture. Figure 3 represents another conceptualization of this relationship.
The three overlapping circles represent (a) the logonomic culture of school, (b) the classroom teacher's personal meaning systems, and (c) the students' personal meaning systems. Within each meaning system are texts which organize expectations and beliefs about school into discourses. The classroom culture is a small section, inasmuch as the logonomic culture of school or discourse of school dominates the interaction at this point. As the school year progresses, the culture of the classroom evolves, with culture moves to the foreground. Teachers and students move in and out of these meaning systems or discourses as they attempt to negotiate the culture of the
classroom as actors within and against the culture of schooling. The shaded area represents the classroom culture constructed by the stakeholders, within which the actors negotiate the culture of assessment.

This dynamic moving in and out of and within meaning systems has a dramatic quality to the construction of classroom culture because the sociocultural nature of meaning-making inevitably casts the actors into the roles of student and teacher as they communicate with each other. The actors take up and put down these socially constituted roles each time they are in the classroom. Hodge and Kress (1988) described this as part of “human semiosis” (p. 261) and argued that this process of making meaning always involved an overlapping of the mimetic plane and the semiotic plane, distinguished as “implying some version(s) of reality as a possible referent and implying some semiotic event(s), linking producers and receivers and signifiers and signifieds into significant relationships,” respectively (p. 262). For example, my students have experiences of reading a text, which is anchored outside our classroom, and these experiences exist as a referent for any reading of texts they would undertake in the class. However, given the social nature of meaning making, interpreting a text within the social relationships of the class is a semiotic event” that dramatically links the features of that event listed above in significant ways.

This sense of drama became more visible on the second day of class. An assignment called “Book Detective” was designed to help students become familiar with their textbook:
What I always like to do the first day I give out books. I have his real short assignment that’s called book detective. It sounds sort of simple, and it is pretty simple, but what it will do is allow you to sort of get a feel for your book. Sort of see what’s in there and then it will be the first grade you get this nine weeks. I will ask you to work on your own on this assignment because I think it’s important that you get to know your own book. If you’ll look at the top of this paper, you’ll see there’s a place for your name, and if you’d like to make up a detective name for yourself if your into imaginary sort of character type things you can do that if you’d like. You don’t have to but if you want to, some people made up detective names for themselves in the earlier classes.

(Transcript, 9/1/95)

Students are assured that the assignment will not be too difficult for them ... it will be graded, and they will need to work on their own. The most interesting possibility for interacting with learners is their possibly making up detective names for themselves, but this is not given emphasis. Rather, I begin to interpret, based my own experiences and practices as a reader, the text of the assignment for the students:

What’s happened to you is you’ve fallen into a maze of your 9th-grade literature book and you can’t really get out because you stuck there. In order to do that, you have to become an expert investigator in order to find your way out. Becoming an expert requires you to work through the following questions. All of these questions can be answered or can be found by using this literature book. There’s nothing in these first 10 questions that cannot be answered or can be found by using your book. You’ll also notice on the back there’s a super challenge for the super detective if you think you’re up to it. You may not be. Not everyone is.

(Transcript, 9/4/95)

In asking the students to become an ‘expert investigator,’ it is suggested that they assume a potentially dramatic role, someone other than themselves. However, focusing the students’ attention exclusively on the literature book effectively limited the role. “There’s nothing in the first 10 questions that cannot be answered or can be found by using this literature book.” As the next selection from the transcripts
indicates, the students were most engaged with the 'super challenge question,' "This author appears on a television program." The correct response was 'Andy Rooney,' who had an essay included in the 9th-grade literature text. Note the interaction between the students and myself in this next section:

S. There's one super challenge.

Figure out who it is? I'll give you a hint for the super challenge. This person, it's a man, this person is still alive. Don't give it away if you who it is. Let them figure it out for themselves. And, he has a show on Sunday. That almost gives it away.

S. The Andy Griffith Show.

S. The word is in this book?

Yes! (responding to first student) That's not really what it is.

S. Can't find the man.

Got to look in the table of contents. Got to think of the author. Look at the authors.

S. Give us a hint. The first name ...

You guys want it all.

S. Just tell them if they're warm.

No. That's too easy. That would give it away.

S. What does his first name begin with?

I can't tell you that.

S. His name (in audible)

I told you it was Sundays. It's a news program. Those are all the clues I can give you. No more clues. You've got to figure it out for yourself. You've got to use your brain. I know you have one.
S. Jimmy Crum?

Jimmy Crum! It’s got to be someone in the textbook. There’s about five minutes left in the class. Let me give you a couple of things to think about. If you’ve finished — as soon as I’ve finished my comments — I’m going to collect this assignment. This is your first grade for this nine weeks. So, you want to make sure, if you haven’t finished today, you can take it home and finish it tonight. If you’ve finished, you’ll have no homework so you’re in good shape. You want to make sure you get this to me either today or tomorrow because I will grade it and will record it in my grade book. As I said yesterday, everyone starts off with an A. We want to keep those. I’m going to have your letters to give back to you tomorrow with comments written back to you. It is important that you bring your literature book to class tomorrow. Tomorrow is Friday. If you’re done, I will collect your papers at this point. The challenge question is extra.

S. Ernest Hemingway!

S. Is there more writing than this one?

You want to make sure that tomorrow you have your folder. Remember, the sheet that I gave you yesterday on expectations and materials for the class because you want to be able to put your letter that I give back to you into your folder as your first piece of writing for this course.

S. Henry Wordsworth Longfellow.

Not even in the right century. Everybody did a good job today!

S. Rooney.

How did you figure it out so quickly?

S. I’m smart.

You are. I knew that. That’s what I try to tell you. (Transcript, 9/1/95)

What’s only hinted at in this selection is that everyone was laughing together during this exchange, despite my attempts to remain serious. This long section of
transcript illustrates two aspects of how the classroom culture is constructed and negotiated as the meaning systems which students bring to the classroom competed with and resisted instructional goals. First, while trying to focus students' attention on the literature text to complete the assignment on their own, their experiences with television and student-to-teacher discussion patterns shifted the discourse to a type of guessing game with me. For example, my giving hints, encouraging students to 'figure it out for themselves,' and directing students to 'look in the table of contents.' One student guesses, 'The Andy Griffith Show,' in response to the hint that the show was on Sunday, apparently thinking of television programs that he knew about (and perhaps watched). After my trying to refocus the students on the table of contents, they continued to ask for more clues ... 'Give us a hint. The first name.' I responded with more general information, 'It's a news program,' and another student guessed, 'Jimmy Crum,' a local former sportscaster. Their questions took me away from the textbook's table of contents to draw on the meaning systems of television to provide more clues. Again, this was not students off-task in an assignment; rather, that this was stakeholders in a classroom culture negotiating to get me to revise my statements (text) to better fit with a meaning system some students brought to the class.

Second, drawing on structures brought about closure to this particular class. Phillips, (1983), in her work in communication in the classroom, called this "the official structure of classroom interaction" (p. 75) and pointed out that students interacted in ways which shifted that structure as the teacher attempted to construct it. In a similar fashion, students resisted the communicative structure I used for closure by
continuing to shout names out in hopes of answering the super challenge question correctly. And, they may have been rehearsing a drama which I had previously set up in the classroom with my communicative structures and expectations. An opening statement signified my desire to bring closure to the class, ‘If you’ve finished ... As soon as I’ve finished my comments, I’m going to collect the assignment,’ followed by a reminder that this assignment will be graded and that it would be in the grade book. I tell them that I have an assignment to return tomorrow and then that ‘the challenge question is extra.’ One student guessed, ‘Ernest Hemingway,” and then another said, ‘Henry Wordsworth Longfellow.’ Ironically, both of these responses were read from the table of contents, which these students were now guessing from to answer the question. These two students had returned to my original instructions in hopes of getting the correct response. When one student did finally respond ‘Rooney,’ I reinforced its correctness by complimenting her intelligence.

From this selection of classroom transcript and the sections from the first day, apparently three levels of meaning systems were involved in the constructing of the classroom culture in the first two days of the school year: (a) my expectations as the classroom teacher and the students’ expectations as 9th-graders; (b) my interpretive use of language and communicative structures in the classroom and students’ interpretive use of language and communicative structures in the classroom; and (c) my re-interpretation and students’ re-interpretation as a result of the ‘drama’ of classroom interaction. The drama was enacted in the ‘give and take’ between the students and me during the discussion of the story, but I directed this give and take
because it was my agenda that set the stage for the social interactions that were
dramatized. Together, these levels combined to create "ideological content" (Hodge &
Kress, 1988, p. 267). This ideological content is "the competing versions of social
reality implied by texts and discourses" (p. 267). In the examples above, each set of
expectations, interpretations, and re-interpretations functioned as versions of "social
reality" within the classroom culture. Figure 4 summarizes these realities from the first
two days and suggests that the process of meaning-making, or semiosis, shifts and is
renegotiated as stakeholders interact and bring competing and alternative meaning
systems to the fore in this classroom. The overlapping circles with arrows represent
the ongoing reflexiveness of this process; the lines are broken to represent how space
for other possibilities of meaning exist. In this way, the dynamic uniqueness of each
day of instruction as well as the classroom as a whole is suggested.

Figure 4
Expectations in Classrooms

D = Students' Expectations
E = Drama of the Classroom
F = Teachers' Expectations
Shaded Area = Interpretation
Therefore, the ideological content of this classroom was created as I attempted to express my social reality, while students were simultaneously expressing and negotiating their own. Because in a classroom setting teachers traditionally are in a position of power over students, the teacher’s ability to control the ideological content is paramount. Although teachers desire the discourse to be much more negotiated, they continually direct the flow. For example, on the first day of my class, I began by talking about a community of learners but later deferred to the process of ‘community building’ by listing rules that the school ‘pretty much asks me to enforce.’ At this place in the discourse, I shifted the ideological content of the class toward a traditional model. In any analysis of social construction, power dynamics influence the ability of stakeholders to shape the direction of that construction. As a further example, on the first day I characterized my expectations as ‘open, collaborative, and interactive,’ and the students’ expectations as ‘unclear, absent.’ Holding these expectations was important because of my position as defined by the logonomic system of schooling. I needed to establish the role as ‘teacher’ despite my initial expectations of creating a student-centered classroom. My interpretation of student expectations as ‘unclear, absent’ was co-created by the same logonomic system. The students were very consciously analyzing me as a teacher and how I planned to structure my classroom into a ‘community of learners.’ Little or no trust existed between us.
In my own personal meaning system, I had a set of expectations in mind, one of which was to create space for student voices to become part of the classroom culture. Yet, from the beginning there existed a tension between my desire for an open dialogic atmosphere and my socialization as a teacher, comprised of various ‘texts’ that have constituted by social identity as a teacher. Luke (1995) referred to ways education has become a ‘process of commodification’ and believed that teachers and students were objectified within a marketplace mentality. As a classroom teacher, part of the work of shifting my instructional practices toward a more negotiatory model was analyzing tensions which arose from the type of teacher I wished to be and the teacher I am within the sociocultural boundaries I inhabit. This tension was dramatized in the scripts and counter scripts (Gutierrez, 1995) which teacher and students created in a classroom culture. Further extending the metaphor of the classroom as a drama, the data from the transcripts of the first days showed that I wanted to ‘direct’ that process, similar to what Director Brook (1986) said:

I think one must split the word ‘direct’ down the middle. Half of directing is, of course, being a director, which means taking charge, making decisions, saying yes and no, having the final say. The other half of directing is maintaining the right direction. Here the director becomes guide; he’s at the helm, he has to have studied the maps, and he has to know whether he’s heading north or south. (p. xi)

The following is an excerpt from the first day’s remarks which was making to the students about the importance of writing. Note the ‘director-like’ language:

You have to bring paper to write on. Most of you seem to have it already and that’s good. Looks like everyone here is pretty prepared. You have paper. You cannot function in this class without something to write on. I cannot supply it for you.
Probably on Friday after the class has settled down a little bit more, because I suspect we'll have some more people in here and some more people leave here, I'll give you a more formal syllabus that will talk about how you will be graded and what sort of assignments you can expect and other things that are more academically oriented, but today I just wanted you to have some general guidelines to work from. Any questions about that so far? Concerns or things your worried about? Now, what I'd like to do next ...

I was in the role of director, and my phrases directed the students toward preparing and planning as critical to successful writing: 'looks like everyone here is pretty prepared' and 'you cannot function in this class without something to write on.' I could have discussed imagination or voice in the context of writing, but instead mentioned the importance of a syllabus (which corresponded with Brooks' notion of map' and 'guidelines to work from') in the same sentence. I was, as Brooks stated, 'at the helm' at this point in the class. However, I am not arguing that this is necessarily bad teaching practice. Learners need direction and also deserve to know what is expected of them in an educational setting. What I am proposing is that my role in this classroom shifted from teacher/researcher to teacher/director, in response to the social interactions within that classroom. And while I am 'acting' these roles in a social drama, I am always directing the discourse of learning. These shifts are both constructed by and construct the dynamics of the classroom culture.

As the culture of the classroom evolved from 'first day' and the scene changed to 'first graded assignment' (Book Detective), I continued my role as actor, creating a role of teacher directing, a role developed in response to the discussion with the students who could be construed as an audience. Concerning the craft of acting,
Jackson (1986) described how critical an audience is to shaping her sense of dramatic performance. The interviewer asked her if she was aware of the audience’s ‘collective consciousness’ as she performed on stage. She responded (Jackson, 1986):

Absolutely. That is the most potent, positive thing that you have over and above the coughing and the rustling, the eating of sweets, the shifting of bums on the seats. That is what makes it a good or bad night. (p. 163)

By analogy then, the most important positive thing I have as a teacher in this classroom, above the note-passing, the whispering, and the rustling of paper, is the consciousness of the students in the classroom, in this context meaning how much they are engaged in the discussion and/or writing connected to an assignment. In other words, whether they were interested. When I attempt to maintain a director role and bring closure to the class, they are shouting out names, ‘Jimmy Crum, Ernest Hemingway, Henry Wordsworth Longfellow,’ which shifted me toward an actor role in which I performed clues to help them complete the assignment. Yet, I continued to direct the opportunities for responses. In the social context of my classroom with its overlapping meaning systems, I appear to renegotiate roles in order to adapt to that context. In the process of that adaptation, I construct, along with the other stakeholders, the context of that classroom. One way to characterize this is a ‘play within a play,’ layered within the social drama of classroom culture. In the play, I am always the director, marshaling the course and boundaries of the social drama in the classroom. Only in the ‘play within a play,’ I am an actor/teacher involved in classroom interaction with the students/actors. We pretend to be collaborative learners,
but we know that the institutions of schooling are primarily about student-teacher relationships which are structured along traditional hierarchies of power. Within these hierarchies, students are constituted in roles subordinate to teachers. For the interactions to shift toward more ‘a negotiatory’ form of drama, or become a ‘real play’ in which all actors are equally invested in creating the classroom world, we have to leave the ‘play within a play.’ For this to happen, I must begin to create new spaces and allow for student voices to be heard.

Further, the context, which included the meaning systems of all participants, shifted my roles in ways of which I am not entirely aware until I review the transcripts of classroom interaction. This suggested that one facet of a teacher-research study is to deconstruct the ways in which I am studying the culture of assessment within the culture of a classroom. In a sense, this issue led to questions about researching myself researching the culture of assessment within the culture of a classroom. I will address these questions in detail in a later chapter.

Viewing a classroom as a type of interactive drama provides a way to better understand how that drama unfolds within an overlap of multiple sign systems. Conceptualizing the construction of classroom culture as a social drama provides a way to start to make sense of the complexity of being both teacher and researcher as well as actor and director in my own classroom. Some scholars (Elam, 1980; Pavis, 1982) have examined relationships among dramatic performance and semiotics. More recently, studying the relationships of semiotics to theater, Fischer-Lichte (1992) articulated the nature of signs and dramatic performance:
For the web of signs of the performance is indissolubly bound up with the actor who creates them, present only in the moment of their production. Nothing is changed by bearing in mind that some signs here—such as costumes, props, stage decor—outlast the process of the performance. (p. 7)

The teacher as both director/actor then generates/participates in 'the web' of signs that becomes a classroom culture. Also, as both teacher and researcher in my own classroom, I generate/participate in this web of signs. Further, as teacher/director and teacher/actor, I am involved in the semoisis of signs. This 'web' is the meaning systems which students and I bring to this classroom, and these systems compete as the learning community is negotiated. However, as I have argued, this web is woven around dynamics of power so that not stakeholders are equally valued.

Another example one month into the school year (September 1995) suggested how this web was constructed as I continued to work with the class. In this selection, I have been reading a story called “The Amigo Brothers,” chosen because it would engage students in a discussion about friendship and competition. The story centers around two talented young boxers who are also best friends. The high point of the story is when the two of them have to fight each other for the championship. I have been reading a portion that prefaces the final fight by showing the two boys running together along the river, training for their upcoming bout.

Who would like to read from there? Someone else? Are you guys tired of hearing my voice?

(A student reads a portion of the text.).
Let's stop there. So-what's -- thank you Rob, that's good. So what's the issue? What's the problem between these two? These two are good friends.

S. They got to fight each other.

They've got to fight each other and there best friends, right? Can you imagine what that would be like? What does it make you think of?

S. (inaudible)

What's this? Movie-what's this called?

S. Gladiators!

Gladiators?

S. Yeah, that one movie (inaudible).

If you were one of these two character situations, movie or story, could you put your feelings aside and box your best friend? Could you do that?

S. Yep.

Do you think it would be easy or hard for you?

S. Easy.

Why?

S. Just cause-

Somebody says easy. Easy for the rest of you, too?

S. No.
S. All you doing is like friendly. Not exactly friendly.

Is competition, being the best, more important than friendship?

S. These guys are still friends after the fight.
That's a good point. James says as long as you understand that you were still friends after the fight. That would be kind of a challenge wouldn't it?

S. Maybe.

When I analyzed the content of this section of transcript, my point in this discussion was: friendship is more important than being the best. However, what becomes interesting was how my intended point was reshaped in the course of classroom interaction. This was basically a teacher-led discussion in which I asked questions about the content of the story and the students responded. Yet several interesting shifts occurred that illuminated how semiosis and the culture of this classroom was created. The first was the mention of the film, ‘Gladiators,’ in response to my question about imagining what it would be like to have to fight your best friend. Here it seemed as the student drew on their own personal knowledge of films. I am not sure of this at first, 'Movie- what's this about,' but then, I incorporated the reference to the film into another question which attempted to get at the relationship between friendship and competition. It seemed that I was in the role of teacher as director, questioning students to move them toward my emphasis for this story. And when I finally asked the question directly, 'is competition, being the best more important than friendship,' a student responded that 'these guys are still friends after the fight,' suggesting a reading of the story which didn’t necessitate making a choice between competition and friendship. At the school where these data were collected, male students, who had previously been friends, fighting was not uncommon. At this school the call it ‘scrapin,’ and when two students were supposed to fight, the question usually
was 'are they gonna scrap?' Further, it may be that within this student's personal meaning system, staying friends after having physically fought someone was not uncommon.

Another possibility is that fighting someone is an acceptable way for males to achieve some level of intimacy or closeness in a culture in which standing up for oneself is highly valued. From this view, fighting didn't necessarily undermine friendship; rather, it functioned as a sign by males to show they are not afraid of conflict. Finally, when I reincorporate James' comments into the discussion and 'that would be kind of a challenge wouldn't it,' he resisted complete ascension with his 'maybe.' The importance in this example is that, as a classroom teacher, I fall into the more traditional patterns of classroom legitimatized by logonomic structures of schooling, despite other intentions I articulated earlier in the school year. This student's resistance may be characterized as typical student-to-teacher behavior. However, resistance can also be viewed as an attempt for students to carve out their own space and bring their own language into the culture of school (Freire & Macdeo, 1987). In this exchange, I seemed to remain the teacher as director, guiding the students to my interpretation of the short story. As a result, I don't move into an actor role in which I am performing the learning process with students which I do more of in the 'Book Detective' sequence.

To this point, I have been characterizing the culture of a 9th-grade classroom in which I was the teacher, by analyzing language used by stakeholders within scenes or
episodes of learning. Within these scenes, based on these data, I have made two primary assertions:

1. The culture of this classroom is dynamic, and it is shaped and reshaped by the stakeholders as they bring their personal meaning systems into play within meaning systems defined by the institutions of schooling. This semiosis involves assuming roles which by their nature creates relationships of power.

2. As the classroom teacher within this culture, I negotiate the roles of teacher-researcher and actor-director as I engage the students in the study of literature and language. These roles bring with them particular instructional expectations and language structures that further shape the culture of learning and assessment. Moreover, the social drama of this classroom involves layers of 'plays' which, acted within the culture of schooling, may tend to reinforce traditional relationships of power.

Researchers looking at assessment in schools have distinguished between the 'culture of assessment' and 'the culture of testing' (Wolf et. al., 1991). Interesting is how a classroom culture constructed by a group of stakeholders might shift in response to standardized testing. For example, how might my claims to be a teacher interested in the process of assessment be impacted by my having to administer high stakes standardized testing (which includes its own structures of meaning) to students? To examine this question and issues surrounding it, I explore how high stakes testing impacts the culture of this 9th-grade classroom.
Exploring Tensions Culture of Testing and the Classroom Community

What happens to the classroom community when the scene changes and the nature of learning and the practices of assessment are suspended to administer Statewide Proficiency Testing? How does this impact the classroom culture? What happens to the roles of the stakeholders? What types of shifts in language result from this form of testing? In this next section, the practice involved in the statewide 9th-grade proficiency test is analyzed as a way to explore these questions.

The first round of the year's 9th-grade proficiency tests, developed to measure student proficiency in the areas of reading, writing, mathematics, and citizenship, were given in October 1995. Prior to administering these tests, there was emphasis by the school administration on preparing the students to pass. Strategies included (a) before- and after-school tutoring for seniors who had not yet passed some or all portions of the test required for a high school diploma, (b) reminders to all staff at faculty meetings concerning the seriousness of the tests, and (c) suggestions for teachers to incorporate testing strategies into their instructional practices. Announcements over the intercom during homeroom reminded students of the importance and seriousness of the upcoming testing.

During the week, the entire school day was reconstituted to provide for the sequence of tests, continuing from 7:30 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. Only those students who had not passed the test had to come to school during this time. At 10:00 a.m., the remainder of the student body would arrive. If a student had not passed the writing but
had passed the other portions of the test, she would only have to come to school in the morning when the writing section was given. Tests were administered through homerooms, and the students were not allowed to talk or leave the room for the 2½ hours of the testing period. The halls were silent, and the lively interaction that characterized them ceased. Some of the faculty liked this atmosphere and commented to me that this was ‘real school’ and ‘wished every day could be like this.’ Personally, I found giving the tests over the four days oppressive and noticed that students seemed tired and lacking in their usual gregariousness after testing. Ironically, some students skipped school on the days the tests were scheduled, knowing that they would be pulled from regular classes later to make up sections. In a sense, they were using the test as a way to get out of regular class. The meaning system of the proficiency tests took such precedence over anything else, that lists were sent around with names of students who had not taken the tests. Our instructions were to escort them to the office immediately for testing if they appeared in our classes. Two entries from my journal indicated how this testing was impacting me as a classroom teacher. The first is dated 10/10/95:

Fourth period is really a pain these days. The addition of Tony has not helped the class. Since his arrival, he and LeVar make it difficult to get much done. I can’t figure LeVar out; he does nothing. Even Tony turns in some work. LeVar does less and less as the quarter progresses. He shows no interest in school, but he never misses class. (Journal, 10/10/95)

What I find striking about this selection is its lack of an exploratory tone that I believe is part of most of my other journal entries. Instead of speculating about how I might assist these students or puzzling about how they are negotiating school, I
complained about what these students are not doing. It may be that these students
didn't really like the class or were bored by what we were doing. However, another
interpretation is that the meaning system of proficiency testing embedded within the
logonomic system of schooling was shaping the interaction in the classroom. This
meaning system of testing is characterized by an emphasis on correctness and product
as opposed to possibilities and process, and coercive silence as opposed to interactive
expressiveness that I had hoped to articulate in my classroom. It seemed as if the
culture of testing displaced the culture of assessment that had been co-created by the
students and me. A result of this displacement, all stakeholders in the culture of the
classroom lose their identities. Therefore, the tenor of the classroom and my attitude
was being influenced by the "culture of testing" (Wolf et al, 1991). Wolf and
colleagues characterized this culture as "a network of activities that extend to the
conduct of testing, the forms of reporting data, and the uses to which those data are
put" (p. 43). The 9th-Grade Proficiency test, as I administered it with students in my
homeroom, was a network of activities in which both student and teacher voices were
silenced. Both the and students and I ceased being co-constructors of the classroom
culture. Instead, we became actors directed by a system of meaning from outside that
culture.

The procedure of this testing took control of what was happening in a
classroom. For example, each day of the test, I had a script of directions from which I
read, to begin, monitor, and complete that day of testing. This script was read by all
teachers in the building to students simultaneously. It included directives for filling out
the forms, responding to the questions, sample questions, or problems to go over with students before actually beginning the test. As the teacher, I was expected to follow this script as it was written. Opportunities for questions from students were provided only after I had completely finished my testing script. Researchers investigating how ritualized instruction and certain 'scripts' in a classroom reproduces particular cultural values (Gutierrez & Larson, 1994; Gutierrez, Larson, & Kreuter, 1995a; McLaren, 1986). Pushing this notion of script further, Gutierrez et al. (1995a) drew on a Bakhtinian frame to explore 'the script of the classroom' within the context of a discourse community. 'Classroom script' is generated primarily by the teacher and mirrors the values articulated by the culture of schooling. They described students' formation of 'counterscript,' which is generated by students who do not comply with teacher rules. At issue are relations of power and what counts as knowledge in the classroom. Their research showed that student knowledge is 'displaced' by teacher knowledge and thus created social space for students to construct counterscript. Yet in their view, these counterscripts are not conducive to collaborative knowledge building. Such monological discourse maintained particular power relationships that limited students' roles in the construction of knowledge. In response to this issue, they posited the possibility of a 'third space' where both scripts might intersect and thus create the potential for more authentic interaction and heteroglossia.

In the case of proficiency testing, the teacher was cast in the role of actor being directed by the testing practices, in a similar way in which students were cast in traditional teacher-centered classrooms. The teacher becomes a 'puppet' in a type of
Punch and Judy show. He ceases being self-directed and ‘his strings are pulled by the powers of testing.’ For both students and the teacher, the scripts are prescribed and prevent the type of authentic interaction that Gutierrez and her colleagues (Gutierrez et al., 1995a) argued for in their study. The individual is expected to follow the directives of those in power. In my role as an administrator of the proficiency test, there was no room for negotiation or interaction that has become a part of this classroom culture as I have represented it in this study. Rather, the climate became one in which concerns about the security of the test and the constant monitoring of student actions became paramount. Therefore, the possibility for a type of ‘third space’ was further diminished by the structure of the test itself and the social structures created to support it.

For example, on one of the testing days, I allowed a student to use bathroom after she was completely finished with her test. Later that morning, I was approached by a colleague who cautioned me about ‘breaking the rules’ to let a student out of the room during the testing period. It appeared that we had given up a portion of our autonomy as professional teachers and had become actors in a role we had not completely chosen. Further, we were being directed by the culture of testing in the service of practices we had no voice in shaping. I was admonished about providing any ‘space’ for students to meet basic needs due to the script the proficiency test was creating for us.

However, my interpretation of the impact of these tests on the culture of school is only a part of the story. Equally significant is how the students perceived the tests
and how taking these tests impacted their learning processes and attitudes toward assessment. To collect data on these questions, I asked students from my class to respond to the following prompt: What is your opinion of the proficiency test? How did you feel about taking the tests? The students wrote a journal entry in which they addressed these questions. I used the journal format because it was a type of writing we had used often in the class. Below are five excerpts that represent a range of responses by students who completed the assignment, followed by an interpretation. First, there was a group of students who thought the proficiency test was good, to which Johnny, a White male student, concurred:

My opinion of the proficiency test is a good thing, but I think if Ohio has to take it, so should everyone else. It's not fair that we should have to take it and not them.

Johnny's concern seems to be not that he has to take the test, but that not everyone has to take it. His comment about fairness suggests that students are quite aware of the political ramifications of assessment. The reference to 'them' seems to refer to other states or perhaps students in private schools. Another group of students connected proficiency testing to learning. This view of proficiency testing is articulated in the following entry by Richie, an African-American male.

I think that the proficiency test is not helping anybody learn anything. It is just making lot of students to not graduate because the test is not helping the students do anything but to hold them from their goals because everybody is not the smartest when it comes to math or citizenship or reading. You can't be a genius all of the time, and they change the test every year at that.
What is striking about this entry is the student’s linking of testing to learning. He believes that the testing ‘is not helping anybody learn anything.’ Also, this student believes that these tests are not helping students do anything but to hold them from their goals, suggesting that, rather than an indication of competency, such tests are impediments or barriers to his and others’ educational goals. This view contrasts with the more compliant perspective of the first student. A third stance on proficiency testing is demonstrated by Renee, a White female:

I think that no one should half (sic) to take it to be able to be able to graduate from high school. People should have to take it if they pay and then they get an honor award.

Renee’s perspective is that proficiency testing should be voluntary rather than compulsory, and that it needs to be a test that you pay to take (seemingly like the SAT) and that it should be linked with an honor or award if you score well. Further, like Richie, she does not believe the proficiency tests should be a graduation requirement. Yet, her comment that if people take these tests, ‘they get an honor award,’ indicates that she perceives testing not as a routine part a high school education; rather, she considers it something that students take as a way to achieve a higher honors. Misty, a White female, professes a view of proficiency testing that is similar to Richie’s:

I think that the proficiency test is so stupid! It takes time from our school year to take it and we have extra classes to study for it! I can’t take history. I have civics. I can’t take art. I have math lab. I love history, but I have to study for that stupid test, and it makes me angry! And you have to pass the test to graduate from high school. That’s even more stupid. I think they should ban all proficiency tests.
Like Richie, Misty sees proficiency tests as a barrier to her goals; however, she is more specific and vehemently charges that the tests keep her out of classes she loves, as she is scheduled into courses in which the curriculum is tied to testing. Finally, Sheronda, an African-American female, offers the most supportive view of testing practices:

My opinion of the proficiency test is that it was all right. It was all right because a lot of the work that was on there was work that I knew how to do, or I studied for it.

Interestingly, Sheronda feels the tests is ‘all right’ not because it made her think creatively or allowed her opportunities to evaluate her own growth, which is what researchers in assessment argue for (Wiggins, 1995), but because she already knew the material or she had studied for it.

Overall, these five students offer a range of views on testing that move from acknowledging the value of the proficiency testing, through claiming that other states or schools should have to take the test, to believing that the testing should be voluntary and grant honors to those who take them, to a view that testing interferes with goals and curricular choices. In each case, the culture of testing is directing students’ experiences. Yet it seems plausible that the practices that make up the culture of testing do even more than reduce students’ and teachers’ ability to direct their own learning. These tests act as a meaning system that constructs and fabricates what they claim to be testing competence in the areas of writing, reading, mathematics, and social studies. Hansen (1993), concerning testing practices in the American culture, claimed that, in most testing, “the signifier acts as a code that is used to produce the signified”
Because proficiency testing has such importance in the social order, it encodes the "proficiencies" in the content areas that it purports to measure. These configurations of knowledge do not exist outside the tests. However, decisions are made that directly impact students' lives as if they do. Hansen (1993) argued that testing tended to confound potential over performance:

The fabricating process works according to what may be called the priority of potential over performance. Because tests act as gatekeepers to many educational and training programs, occupations, and other sectors of social activity, the likelihood that someone will be able to do something as determined by a test becomes more important than one's actually doing it. (p. 288)

In other words, rather than providing opportunities or space for students and teachers to interact and negotiate a culture of learning, or enact an interpretive community that involves learners in various roles constructing knowledge, proficiency testing measures 'knowledge.' However, that knowledge is produced by the codes of testing and hence is nonauthentic in the sense that it is not what students in a classroom and I in the role of the teacher would be doing. Therefore, social processes of learning are sacrificed to the pursuit of a decontextualized product. Again the 'play within the play' undermines the real drama of learning which involves ongoing negotiation among stakeholders.

Further, since the 9th-Grade Proficiency Tests are given such emphasis in the overall culture of schooling, questions about how they impact the culture of my 9th-grade English classroom seem pertinent. For example, does the interaction in the classroom become more product-oriented as a result of testing? Do the students and
teacher shift their classroom talk from an exploratory mode in which possibilities are considered, to an emphasis on getting the right answer? How are the roles of teacher, researcher, actor, and director that have been suggested by the analysis of classroom data affected by these tests?

In order to pursue these questions, transcripts are reviewed, from classroom interactions on the first Monday following the completion of the proficiency tests. In this section, I have been explaining a story-writing assignment to the students. Questions are being asked about the assignment, and I am attempting to provide an example by talking about the type of story I might write:

I was thinking I might want to write this story about a guy whose father died when he as a senior in high school and what that would be like for someone. When I was in high school, that happened to my best friend, and it changed his life forever.

Male student (MS). Couldn’t get (inaudible)

After his father died when he was a senior. Had nothing to do with drugs.

MS. It cured that.

So what I did when I was going to write this story was I remembered that experience. If you want to write a story that’s a violent story that’s up to you. If you want to write a story where people die and people get killed you can do that. That’s fine. The one thing I cannot allow is, I cannot stand profanity in your short stories.

MS How come?

If you want to describe graphically fights or murders, that kind of stuff that’s fine.

MS I thought you weren’t supposed to have profanity in it?
You can read those as well.

MS We can’t write ‘em though?

In this class, I’m going to ask you not to put that in your short stories because the people who are my bosses, the administration, asked me to keep that out of (in audible). Everyone has rules to live by, me too. Ssh. So you can write any kind of story you want. It can be as descriptive as you want. The only two requirements are those four structures that are on the board. Characters, at least two. Dialogue, which is conversation. A plot and a setting. Now I’m going to give you the remainder of the period to start to work on this.

MS If you walk down the hall you hear real profanity.

I know.

MS So what makes the difference?

Because that’s the way we’re going to do it. So the choices are either you start your own short story today or you start on the reading assignment or read your library book. This is time for you to work. Any questions?

S How do you spell California?

This is a completely understandable type of question considering the fact that I have created a double bind in which I tell students they can write any type of story they want as long as they do it the way I prescribe. Also, looking at the question about profanity, it may be that this student simply wants permission to use language that many teachers would not permit in their classrooms. However, the questions about using profanity in the short stories also suggest larger issues of authenticity of language for this student. Either way, given the power of high stakes testing such as proficiency tests to influence the culture of school and direct student learning, using the language that you hear when you walk down the halls can be viewed as a way to reestablish their
own voice, create a new space, and increase control over one’s own learning. This
voice and control has been displaced during four days of testing.

Also, when students question me about using profanity in their stories, I defer
to a higher authority ‘my bosses, the administration,” rather than negotiate the issue
within the boundaries of the classroom we have been in the process of co-creating.
When students ask why they have to take the proficiency tests, my final response
would inevitably be, “Because the State of Ohio says we do, and that’s the way we’re
going to do it.” This is also deferring to a higher authority and sounds very similar to
the statement, ‘because that’s the way we’re going to do it.’ A structure that supports
the culture of testing, the power of abstract, institutional authority, and emphasis of
product over process, seem to be shaping the interactions between the students and me
during this section of the class. Finally, one of the issues at this high school is trust.
Many students don’t trust their teachers. I spent a fair amount of time trying to build
trust as part of the culture of learning within this classroom. Although it is never
directly stated by a student, the administering of these tests may be perceived as
compromising or betraying the culture we’ve created because it subverts and
reconstitutes dynamics of the classroom. In this reconstitution, both of us become
actors directed by the practices of testing; both of us cease to be researchers of our
learning processes and focus on product and correctness.

A key feature of this construction is to understand context as another text. This
text is authored by the stakeholders and evolves over the school year as we invent,
revise, and edit the particular culture of the classroom. Viewing context as text brings
to the fore the primacy of intertextuality as a way to make meaning in classrooms. This intertextuality is realized in the process whereby participants draw on other meaning systems as they negotiate for interpretive space in the classroom. These negotiatory processes create a new “text” that is the context of the classroom; this text is multivocal and is reworked ongoingly by learners. Reworking involves dialogue among learners regarding goals and how such goals are achieved. Halliday (1985), focusing on both product and process, recognized how context functions as another text, as he explained:

We need to see text as product in the sense that it is output, something that can be recorded and studies, having a certain construction that can be represented in systematic terms. It is a process in the sense of a continuous process of semantic choice, a movement through the network of meaning potential, with each set of choices constituting the environment for a further set. (p. 10)

Halliday (1985) emphasized how each “set of choices” creates another “set” of meaning possibilities. In terms of a culture of assessment, each meeting of the class is a new “text” with new possibilities for evaluative potential. In this way, the text indeed functions as another data source which can be analyzed form multiple frames.

In this chapter, I argued for frames from which to view the context of one 9th-grade classroom. Within this frame, I have explored the dramatic nature of classroom interactions, and how issues of power and resistance open up an close down space as diverse voices compete for control of knowledge. Figure 5 shows the relationship among frames as I have brought them to bear on a context culture of classroom-based assessment.
Each of the frames offers a way of a classroom culture. Using them, it is possible to glimpse how the roles, meaning systems, and interpretive spaces of individuals outside of school enter a classroom with that individual. Also, it is possible to glimpse how those roles, meaning systems, and interpretive spaces interlace to construct a culture of assessment in a classroom.
In this chapter, I have focused on the classroom as a whole. The context I have characterized by an analysis of transcripts, journal entries, and written responses of selected students has suggested a classroom culture that shifted as the stakeholders interacted with each other and the culture of schooling. I have attempted to outline a culture of assessment within this classroom as one in which diversity, negotiation, heteroglossia, and ownership are socially construed and underpin a culture of learning. Finally, I have juxtaposed this culture of assessment with a culture of testing as articulated by the 9th-Grade Proficiency Test to suggest dissonance between the two for learners. However, key questions remain about how individual students in this classroom conceptualize assessment and how my role as the teacher-researcher impact that conceptualization. In this study, because I have argued for the primacy of multiple meaning systems in the construction of a culture assessment in the classroom, a careful analysis of how these systems figure into our views of assessment is crucial. To look more closely at this system, examining the portfolio, which includes a videotaped conference, as a site where meaning systems converge as I assess literacy development with students, is appropriate. This approach provides insights into how we construct language or produce scripts to assess literacy growth and language development over a period of time. The question then becomes how such scripts are reconfigured into the drama of the classroom culture as well are influenced by the issues of gender, race, and power. In order to pursue these and other questions, the next chapter will present four
case studies of students and examine how these stakeholders are specifically involved in the construction of the culture of assessment.
CHAPTER 5
CONSTRUCTING CASE STUDIES

Introduction

In recent case study research, Stake (1995) argued for a range of researcher roles played by the those seeking to do case studies. One of these roles was "case researcher as teacher" (p. 91):

The classroom teacher soon knows each individual face and something about the mind behind it, but all too little. Were the teacher to know those minds better, sometimes the teaching would be better. Just how much effort the teacher should undertake to know the learners individually remains a puzzle, something decided moment to moment, always a key aspect in teaching style... There is always so much the teacher cannot know about learners. (p. 92)

In these comments, Stake touched on two key issues for the present study. First, teacher-researchers' attempts to better understand cognitive processes at work within individual students is a substantive part of classroom work, yet this work is articulated moment to moment within social interactions. Second, any case study is necessarily incomplete because meaning is constructed within social contexts which are continually reconstituted by the participants. Because I am focusing on the practices and language of classroom-based assessment in this study, constructing case studies
allows me to probe the roles negotiated by students and me in the context of assessment practices and the language we use for those negotiations.

In the previous chapter, I characterized the classroom context as a data source and evolving text. Examining issues and directions for language research in classrooms, Bloome (1994) argued for a need for researchers to look closely at how the "social context of research is integral to the interpretation of research" (p. 233). Also, he saw a lack of theory and inadequate models to consider the nature of a contextual/interpretive relationships in literacy research. Bloome's concerns echoed the explorations of Bruner (1990) in an argument he makes for "folk psychology" (p. 35). Bruner explained that "folk psychology" is "a system by which people organize their experience in, knowledge about, and transactions with the social world" (p. 35).

One approach for exploring interpretive relationships and understanding those relationships within a social world is to analyze case studies from this semiotic, multiperspective frame which I have developed. This approach will provide a way to view how meaning systems interrelate to construct a classroom culture of assessment, how the context influences those interrelations and attempts to faithfully represent them.

The "representational crisis" is an issue in qualitative research being discussed at the time of this writing. Denzin (1994) asked how people knew about lived experience captured in a text, or narrated in language, when language constructed how and what we see. Stated differently, because language is the means through which we make sense of the world, even create that world, and language is dynamic and
reconstitutive, how can researchers represent the experience of another in any kind of final or ‘authentic’ way? Other researchers attempted to address this problem. Van Maanen (1988) and Wolf (1992), exploring ethnographic writing, constructed texts that told the same tale three ways. Other researchers in literacy studies (Beach, 1992; Brunner, 1994; Green, 1992; Heap, 1992) challenged the field to adopt multiple stances or perspectives on the same event to try to understand the complexity of the social processes of literacy. This lack of one singular model for reporting and representing research creates an opportunity for experimentation in the way research texts are organized, presented, and interpreted (Marcus & Fisher, 1986).

Emerging from the sociodramatic analyses of classroom interaction in the previous chapter is a notion of “staging,” how the assessment practices in the classroom are produced for public view and how the roles of actor/teacher/director are staged within interactions with students. Further, from a research perspective, this metaphor of staging became useful for examining how the data from this study were staged. A key question in constructing these case studies becomes ‘what is the relationship between how the case studies are displayed and my role(s) within the study itself?’ One consideration is how the classroom interactions and layers of assessment practices create a ‘play within a play.’ For example, on one hand, there is the drama of institution of schooling which assigns particular roles for teachers and students. Second, there is the drama of a classroom, which I argue is a construction of multiple meaning systems negotiated by stakeholders. Third, there is the drama of portfolio conferences taking place between the student and me as the classroom teacher. Fourth,
there is the dramatizing of the data which I display and interpret to inquire into the nature of the culture of assessment. Looking at four students as cases allows for exploration of the interrelationships among these layers of drama and also provides insights into how meaning systems collide within these layers.

In these four cases of assessment, I tried to characterize and interpret the voices of the stakeholders in ways that preserved the diversity of each and tried show how the frame I have developed provided a view of assessment within and across case studies. In each case, I describe the student and then attempt to structure the comments of the student about assessment and its relationships to learning so that their views emerge. Consideration is given to the parent's perspective on assessment and how the parent perceives assessment to the student's views. I fully acknowledge that my structuring is an interpretation and the decisions I have made to describe the data in each case shape the presentation of those cases. Therefore, my perspective as the teacher-researcher constructs the version of the case that emerges. In a later chapter, I will explore the ramifications of this perspective and the issues which emerge. The first case study follows, with some of the data I collected and then analyzed using a multidisciplinary frame. Four questions, which connect directly to the five framing questions of the study, guide this section of my research:

1. How do students contribute to a drama of social construction of me as the classroom teacher?

2. How is the drama layered within the interactions of the classroom?
3. What is the worth of portfolios in a culture of assessment?

4. What are the relationships of portfolios to other types of assessment?

In a recent essay, Bruner (1995) explored a concept of “self” within cultural meaning systems. Near the end his speculations, Bruner claimed that “self, as it were, is the center of gravity of all meaning systems” (p. 26). Further, it is through interactions with others that this self is constructed. In terms of the culture of assessment, I have argued that assessment in a classroom exists as a socially-constituted discourse with discursive practices that govern how it unfolds within student-teacher interactions. From this perspective, it is significant to question how students’ sense of themselves as learners is constructed within the drama of assessment, because it provides a way to focus on the layers of drama in the classroom. Further, examining how students’ meaning systems and social interactions contribute to the construction of my role as teacher suggests relationships among layers. These layers of drama constitute plays within a play which become the spaces where practices and rules of assessment interact with personal meaning systems. Overarching goals of the case studies of Sandra, Eric, Sam, and Tammy are interrogating how portfolios and other forms of assessment are staged and subsequently shape these dramatic spaces and are themselves a layer of the culture of assessment.

**Sandra**

Sandra, a 15-year-old Caucasian student at an urban high school, is the third of four children ... she has an older brother and sister and a younger sister. Her brother
did not graduate from high school. She lives close to the school and grew up in the house and community in which her family currently resides. She likes her community because of ‘the way people are really free to do as they choose.’ She attended two different elementary schools, which she recalls as ‘boring,’ but she liked middle school because of the way ‘teachers treated everyone fairly.’ Since middle school, she has liked literature, especially reading plays. Sandra also likes horror books and her favorite author is Stephen King, and the last book she read was *it*. She feels that this year has been a ‘good year, but it’s been hard,’ and she wishes the teachers would pressure students more to get their work done.

Sandra worked diligently in my 9th-grade English class. As a student, she was quiet, even shy, and I could count on her to finish whatever she started. She was very conscientious about completing assignments and almost always asked me to make up whatever work she may have missed due to absences. During class discussions, she was relatively quiet and rarely spoke unless she was called on to respond to questions or issues being talked about. In small groups, she cooperated but did not take the lead in working through collaborative writings or other group projects. She had one good friend in the class who she always entered and left the class with every day. On the surface, I felt I had a good teacher-to-student relationship with her, and she seemed eager to be successful in the class. Yet, I had a difficult time connecting with her as a person, though, even in the interview and conference. I felt like she never completely trusted me, but it seems that my questions and the way I structured interactions contributed to the construction of the distance that remained between us. As a writer,
she worked quickly to get ideas down on paper, but her texts often contained numerous
spelling and punctuation errors. In this interview, I talked to Sandra about her writing
and choosing her own writing assignments:

What sort of writing do you like to do?

S. Writing where you can just write out of your own thoughts. Rather
    than.... Don’t have to have a topic.

So you like choices?

S. Yeah.

She prefers choosing her own topic rather than having them assigned. Sandra
likes horror stories that interest her, and she also likes to read plays. About her favorite
novelist, Stephen King, she told me:

Do you think Stephen King is good writer?

S. Uhhuh.

How does he hold your interest?

S. What do you mean?

How does he keep you wanting to turn the page and read more?

S. Where he has everything happening like afterwards. You don’t
    have to read the boring parts. It’s not boring. It’s just all interesting to
    me.

In terms of content, these data suggested that, for Sandra, it is important that a
work of literature interests her by having a lot of things happening in the book.
Otherwise, she finds it boring. On another level, the structure of the interview casts me
as the director, controlling the responses. For example, to my rhetorical question about
her writing, 'so you like choices,' she replied with one word, "Yeah." Interestingly, when I finally ask a question that implies process, 'how does he hold your interest?' Sandra replied with a question of her own that asks for clarification, 'what do you mean?' My response is another how question which seems to open up interpretive space for her to comment on the what it is about Stephen King, her favorite author, that fuels her reading.

Sandra's parents have lived for 38 years in the community in which their daughter attended school. Her mother, Sue, completed a survey about assessment and then agreed to be interviewed via telephone, to follow up her responses to the survey questions. Sue believed that her daughter has the opportunity to get a good education at the high school she attends and that the school effectively communicates her daughter's progress to both her and her husband. On the survey, I asked her what activities outside school her daughter participates in which have a positive effect on Sandra's overall education. She wrote 'none.' In the follow-up interview, I asked her about this response, and also whether she observed her student writing, reading, and drawing outside of school. She remarked that she wasn't clear how activities outside of school connected to what was happening in school, but that her daughter read magazines and sometimes popular novels and wrote letters to friends.

In terms of assessment, Sue thinks the tests and quizzes her daughter takes in class are important. She helps her study for them by sitting at the kitchen table of their home and asking her questions to help her prepare. Sometimes, she reads the chapters in books with her to help her better understand the material. Sue thinks the 9th-Grade
Proficiency Test administered by the State of Ohio is a good idea. She believed that many students are graduating from high school without achieving competency in reading and other basic skills. For Sandra, she thinks this test will assure that her child has these skills. The test is necessary, because a child, without some pressure to work toward a particular standard, 'is only going to learn what they want to learn.' Sue believed that proficiency testing will direct her daughter's learning by pressuring her to achieve and providing accountability.

**Sandra's Perspective on Assessment.**

To understand Sandra's perspective on assessment, it is important to first consider her portfolios. Her first portfolio (Table 3) contains work she completed during middle school (grades 6, 7, and 8), including (a) an essay entitled, "The Time I Had an Argument with a Friend," (b) two sets of responses to questions about a short story (one from 7th-grade and one from 8th-grade), and (c) an essay entitled, "Why Drugs Should not be Allowed in the United States." These were chosen by Sandra in conferences with her language arts teachers. The second portfolio (Table 4) includes work she has self-selected during the year she was in my 9th-grade English class and her videotaped portfolio conference: (a) her final exam essay in which she wrote about a book she read on rock musician, Jim Morrison, (b) a response she wrote to a novel we read as a class, *When Legends Die* by Borland, (c) three journal entries ("The Value of Music," "The Place I Would Like to be Right Now," and "Something in My Life I Really Hate"), (d) a test concerning Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, (e) a cover
sheet to a poetry journal (she couldn’t find the poems), and (f) an essay, “Why I think
There Should Not be any Drugs” (two drafts), and (g) a form, ‘Final Folder/Portfolio
Evaluation,’ used to look retrospectively over the year.

Table 3
Sandra’s Middle School Portfolio

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essay against drug use</td>
<td>Self-selected by the student - 8th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay - argument with a friend</td>
<td>Columbus writing assessment - 7th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses to questions about short story</td>
<td>Assignment in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses to questions about short story</td>
<td>Assignment in class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4
Sandra’s 9th-Grade Portfolio

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essay - response to a book about Jim Morrison</td>
<td>Final exam for class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to novel, “When Legends Die”</td>
<td>Assignment for class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three entries from her journal</td>
<td>Assignment for class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test about “Romeo and Juliet”</td>
<td>Teacher-constructed test about the play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coversheet for poetry journal</td>
<td>Introduction to the group of poems she wrote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay against drug use</td>
<td>Assignment for class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation form for portfolio</td>
<td>Final self-evaluation for the year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From her portfolio and a subsequent interview, Sandra’s view of assessment
and its relationships with learning began to emerge. The portfolio conference I had
with Sandra took place during regular classroom instruction. To prepare for the
conference, she organized her portfolio and completed a form that I prepared to assist
students with the process of evaluation. In the conference itself, Sandra sat beside me at my desk located in the from of the room. A student in the class volunteered to use the camera which was mounted on a tripod. During the conference, I made notes on the evaluation sheet that she had completed. What follows next is a transcription of that conference. As the camera filmed our conference, we assumed the roles of teacher and student. However, during the drama of the conference, there were shifts into other roles as well.

**Portfolio Conference with Sandra.**

O.K. Let's see. O.K. You chose these pieces of work. Hmm. Where's your poems – the one honesty? What's this one?

S. It's just a writing paper that I've chosen.

Was this earlier in the year?

S. Yeah.

Let's talk about... I mean, based on this portfolio what do you think your strengths are as a learner ... as a reader/writer?

S. That I'm a good writer (laughs).

What do you mean a good writer?

S. That I get it done.

Let's talk about your writing. Do you like to work here at school, or at home? Do you have a place where you feel comfortable writing?

S. I prefer to write at home.

O.K. What are some goals you'd like to set for yourself? Some things you'd like improve on?
S. I would like to write longer stories.

Well, I think you are... You’re more confident about your writing, particularly this last nine weeks. I mean you’ve always been good about getting things done, tuning in daily assignments - things like that.

S. (She nods but says nothing).

What about the portfolio? Has the portfolio helped you this year?

S. Yeah.

How?

S. It let’s me see how I’m doing... what I’ve improved on.

What about literature? Did you like reading When Legends Die, even though we ran out of time as a class to finish discussing the book?

S. Some of it.

Would you like to have read more novels as a class?

S. Yeah.

I think that was one of the mistakes I made as a teacher. We should have spent more time reading novels and other literature.

S. (She thumbs through her papers while I talk to her.)

So, what about this summer? Are you going to work or just hang out? Do you know?

S. I’d like to get a job-but I don’t know.

Well, I want to say that I think you’ve done a lot of excellent work and I’ve really enjoyed having you as a student.

S. (Gets up and smiles as she returns to her seat.)
On one level, this exchange suggests a reenactment of the teacher-led discussion in which I control the script and the structure of the discourse of the portfolio conference. However, this interaction also takes place within the larger dramas of the classroom and the culture of school. Our assessment drama is folded into these plays. Sandra recognizes that in the drama of schooling, 'getting it done' is recognized as a key component of success. This construct of success connects with the view articulated by Sandra's mother, Sue, who believes that competency and accountability are important to education. When I ask her about what her portfolio says about her strengths as a writer, she laughs as she comments 'that I'm a good writer.' When I attempt to follow up by asking 'what do you mean a good writer?' she states emphatically, 'that I get it done.' It seems that Sandra views the portfolio as a product, a collection of work that she has completed. Her next comment about preferring to write at home is resonant with her separation of her school world where, 'getting it done' is paramount from her home world where she prefers to write and read what she likes.

Despite my attempts to conceptualize and administer portfolios as sites for reflective change, a space where home and school literacy interconnect, the portfolio plays out as a interchange in which both the roles of Sandra as student and me as the teacher are constructed by the logonomic culture of schooling. Sandra is well-versed in the traditional role of student. Her role contributed to my own traditional role of teacher-as-director by creating space for me to act as the traditional teacher in charge of student learning. Despite my own internal desire to shift this role toward a more
student-centered discourse, it seems the scripts we are working with keep us constructing what we both already have rehearsed. That construction unfolds as the play within the play. As stakeholders, Sandra and I dramatize the role of teacher and student in the context of looking at her portfolio within the larger drama of the culture of school. On another level, there is a collision of meaning systems taking place. As a teacher-researcher, I imagined portfolios to be sites for potential change. This system of meaning collided with my desire for control in the classroom as defined by the logonomic cultures of schooling.

Also, Sandra’s perception of herself as a learner collides with my hope for portfolios as a classroom-based assessment system. These collisions shape the semiotic drama of my classroom, and suggest the worth of portfolios as spaces for inquiry into culture of assessment. This inquiry encouraged me to look at the interaction between Sandra and me as mutually constitutive of our roles in the classroom. The role that I create in my own classroom is bound up with the role that Sandra, as a student, assumes in the classroom. Further, because I have established the predominance of my teacher/director role in the previous chapter, portfolios can be viewed as a two-way window into the drama of the culture of assessment. Looking into the drama, it is interesting to note how the portfolio becomes a site where Sandra reaffirms her view of the assessment and learning despite my hopes for change. Looking out from the drama, it is eye-opening and humbling to note how the portfolio becomes a site where I acknowledge my complicity in a structuring of the interactions that undermine my own
desires for portfolios. Ironically, the portfolio becomes a site to reflect on the processes that undermine portfolio goals.

These processes are examples of the scripts and counterscripts that Gutierrez et al. (1995a) explore. The next two sections present selections from an interview I conducted during class and Sandra’s responses to videotapes of other student’s portfolio conferences. These data can be viewed as scripts of interactions between Sandra and me and Sandra and her peers. Closer examination of these events provides insights into processes at work in constructing a culture of assessment. In this first section, below, there is a short exchange in which Sandra responds to specific questions about taking tests.

Did you do pretty well in elementary school? Like your teachers? Have a pretty good time? What sort of things did they ask you to do? Do remember what kind of work you did?

S. Not really.

Learned math, that sort of stuff?

S. Yeah.

Do you remember taking any tests in middle school?

S. Yeah.

What do you remember about those?

S. They were boring.

What do you mean boring?

S. Wasn’t interesting.

What sort of books did you read in middle school? Do you remember?
S. Not really.

Did you read stories, plays?

S. Yeah, we read mostly plays out of literature books.

And did you take tests over the stuff you had to read?

S. Uhhuh.

Were those hard for you?

S. It was easy if you knew what happen in the play. If you paid attention. But if you didn’t, then it was hard.

So what kind of tests were they? Multiple choice? Fill in the blank type of stuff.

S. Uhhuh.

Did you get nervous about taking those tests? Was it pretty easy for you?

S. It was pretty easy.

This exchange can be read as an example of “transcendent script,” which Gutierrez et al. (1995b) characterized as “dominant forms of knowledge generally valued as legitimate by both the local culture and the larger society” (p. 448). My questions and Sandra’s responses reaffirm our existing student-teacher relationship. Her echoing of my words, ‘was it pretty easy for you,’ suggest she is perhaps getting through the interview, getting it done, or confused by my multiple questions. However, on another level, we are staging the roles we have already created as part of the culture of the classroom.
The next piece in Sandra's perspective is her interpretation of videotapes of three portfolio conferences. For this task, I designed a form that had the following instructions:

For each conference, watch the interaction between the teacher and the student. Then, tell what you think is going on. You may write sentences, key words or phrases if you like. I am interested in what you see and your interpretations.

The following are the texts that Sandra constructed in response to the videotape. I have preserved the student's original spelling and structure in each text.

Conference #1. 'they are talking about what has done in this class and what he wants to get better at. and finding out how he feels about this class,'

Conference #2. 'talking about his grades and what he has done and what he wants to get better at.'

Conference #3. 'How He feels about this class and about his work and what he want to get better at. What he thinks he is good at.'

These short responses seem primarily descriptive. Sandra wrote down what she saw on the videotape. However, on another layer, as scripts, Sandra is still acting the role as student putting down what she imagines will satisfy my written request, my directions. There is very little variation among her responses. Sandra seems to be staying in role as a student going through the motions. Once again, she gets it done.

When I revisit the transcript of the portfolio conference with Sandra, I am struck by how I control and direct the language and interaction of the conference. For example, the first comment I make is about what is missing, 'Hmm...where's your
poems - the one on honesty?’ From that point, Sandra’s responses are either one word, ‘year’ (3 times in the short discourse above) or short one-sentence answers to my questions. It is possible that the first question has created a situation in which she perceives that the portfolio conference is about discovering what is missing. Further, this question seems to shift the focus of the conference away from a process to a product. The next question I ask is, ‘What is this one?’ and she responds, ‘It’s just a writing paper.’ Instead of exploring why she chose this one, I immediately move to a question which asks her to evaluate the entire portfolio and then draw conclusions about her strengths as a reader/writer. Overall, it appears that Sandra constructs a view of assessment which is product-oriented and is reinforced by the views of assessment found in the school and implicit in my staging of the structure of the portfolio conference.

Tierney, Carter, and Desai (1991) embedded portfolios in an interactive, student-centered approach to assessment in which assessment is based on what students actually do; it is integrated with classroom instruction, is multifaceted, and provides students with the opportunity for ongoing self-assessment. I accept this view of portfolios, and in the introduction to this study, I posited a definition of portfolios as sites within episodes of learning where students, using their own work within a conference setting, can make choices to describe, reaffirm, and even rewrite the text of their own learning. I imagined that portfolios could work to empower students to become more aware of the processes of their own learning and begin to take more responsibility for that learning.
In Sandra’s case, it seems that the data are disconfirming, and my definition of portfolios needs to be revised to include the possibility of portfolios as sites where students resist ‘empowerment’ or ‘reflectiveness’ as I constructed it. Yet this disconfirming case allows me the possibility of negotiating a portfolio with Sandra as a site where I confront my own needs for control and my desires to direct learning in the classroom.

Eric

Eric, an African-American male, presented a very different portfolio in this next case study, of which the goals were characterization of his role in a culture of assessment and deconstructing his interaction in my classroom.

Eric is a slender, light-skinned, sensitive student who is conscientious about grades. He sat in the back of the class, and though he rarely volunteered to speak in class, he responded when I called on him in discussions about literature and assignments or projects for the class. Eric was active in sports (he played on the high school basketball team) and often talked about teams and individual players with other members of the class. He didn’t interact with a large number of students; he had one good friend that he sat next to in my class and talked to most of the time. In terms of his work in the class, he diligently completed most assignments. His portfolio is the most inclusive and contains the most selections of all the cases examined in this study.

Eric is the third oldest of five children. At the time of this study, his sister was a senior at Eric’s school. His family has lived in their current residence for about
'three, four years.' He attended four different elementary schools because his family moved three different times during this period. For Eric, grades 3, 4, and 5 were the most memorable because he was in one school all three years, and he remembers being successful in spelling and math. In middle school, Eric liked science and math, particularly science because, 'we'd dissect stuff.' He remembers taking what he calls 'A, B, C, D tests,' which he studied for the night before and 'a little bit that same day.' This 9th-grade year, Eric characterized as going fast; he told me he had to work harder, and there was more material to understand. As a writer, Eric was very faithful about keeping his portfolio. This is a excerpt from one interview I conducted with him:

I noticed that you've been pretty conscientious this year about keeping up with your folder and getting things done. Is keeping the work over the entire quarter and over the year...Have you liked doing that?

E. It's easy.

How is it easy for you?

E. It's just easy to do.

Do you feel like you're able to see yourself changing or growing or improving here in this class?

E. Not really.

Why not?

E. I just didn't.

So you think you're pretty much the same writer as when you me in? Things haven't changed that much for you?

E. No.
What's interesting here is my attempt to move from Eric's practice of conscientiously keeping his portfolio to a question that seeks to connect that practice to an acknowledgment of his growth as a writer in my class. However, he resists my attempt at directing his responses. He seems to like the portfolio because 'its just easy to do.' My teacher-to-student relationship with Eric was cordial, but he kept his distance. Grades were important to him, and he often asked questions about how many points a draft of a writing assignment was worth, or whether conferences with me 'counted towards his grade.'

As a reader, Eric prefers magazines like "Sports Illustrated" and recalls the last book he read was about 'a dude that played football, and he was on steroids, and he died of that.' Overall, Eric explains that he keeps busy playing 'too many sports' to have time to read very much. When he finishes high school, he wants to go to college, but he's unsure what school he will attend.

Eric's parents have lived in the community for 21 years. In the survey completed by his mother, Sylvia expressed a general dissatisfaction with the education her son was receiving at the high school. First, she believes that the school does not effectively communicate Eric's progress to her home. She believes that the school contacts parents primarily when there is 'a problem' instead of reporting ongoing success. She also believes that some of the classes are 'unruly' and that some teachers do not exercise enough control in their classrooms. As a result, she believes that education is 'restricted.' By restricted, she means that teachers spend too much time
dealing with students who act up which takes away from instructional effectiveness and learning opportunities for ‘serious students.’ Overall, she believes that the school should be involved in more self-esteem building and take a more cultural approach to education.

Sylvia views assessment as part of learning. She doesn’t help her son study or prepare for quizzes or tests, because she believes that, at the high school level, he is capable of completing his assignments and studying materials on his own. In terms of the 9th-Grade Proficiency Test, she believes that preparation for it should start ‘before the fact, not after the fact.’ As it stands now, Sylvia believes that the test is given to the students without really giving them the instructional preparation they need to pass it. This preparation should start in grade school.

Outside of school, she reports seeing Eric ‘just drawing and writing at home sometimes.’ Also, attending church, participation in sports, and working part-time at local grocery store contribute positively to Eric’s overall education by keeping him part of a community and teaching him responsibility. Perhaps the most insightful comments Sylvia made to me was about a parent’s role in encouraging reading and writing. She wrote, “I wished personally I would have encouraged reading more often each day. I think the school needs to encourage writing also.” It seems that she recognizes the importance of reading and somewhat regrets not encouraging her son’s independent reading. Also, she does not seem satisfied with the amount of emphasis the school places on writing. Together, these two comments resonate with her general dissatisfaction with the quality of education which Eric is getting at this high school.
Sylvia values education for her son, yet she questions whether the systems operating at this school are meeting his educational needs and abilities.

**Eric's Perspective on Assessment.**

As with Sandra's case, Eric's perspective on assessment is embedded in his portfolios. The first portfolio (Table 5) is from middle school (grades 6, 7, 8) and is composed of writing samples from formative assessments. These are: (a) a series of journal-type paragraphs (four total), each labeled, "Creative Writing," (b) a 2-paragraph narrative about discovering an imaginary island, and (c) a grade 7 'Primary Trait Formative Test," in which students responded to five questions about "King Midas and the Golden Touch." Eric's portfolio for my class (Table 6) contains work collected over the entire school year: (a) five 'Personal Essays,' (b) a research essay entitled 'Black Muslims and The Religion of Islam,' (c) two essay tests, (d) a series of journals, and (e) a final exam essay which responds to a self-selected article about basketball player Glen Robinson.

It appears that Eric's middle school portfolio was used to archive writing assessments given by the district. It is impossible to tell how much of the decision-making process involved Eric. However, because this portfolio contains only writing assessments, is plausible that all of these were chosen by Eric's classroom teachers.
Table 5
Eric’s Middle School Portfolio

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Contents</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creative writing series (4)</td>
<td>5th-grade writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Island narrative</td>
<td>6th-grade writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to “King Midas”</td>
<td>7th-grade writing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6
Eric’s 9th-Grade Portfolio

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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As I have argued earlier in this study, the portfolio is not merely a collection of student texts; it also includes the student-teacher conferences. In this next section, I present selected transcripts from the conference between Eric and me, which took place during a normal class. As in the portfolio conference with Sandra, a student in the class videotaped the interchange between us. During the course of the conference, I stopped and spoke to other members of the class. I have included these ‘asides’...
because they figure into the drama of the performance of the conference in a significant way.

So, you chose these because you got 100%...you've got two tests...Your work ...um you've got all your work done; you've got really good grades. If you were going to set two goals for yourself, what would they be? [I turn out and look at the class.] Ssh...I can't hear.

E. Get good grades. Get all my work done.

I think you already do that. What about, I mean, grades are important. What about something personal, something you'd like to work on.

E. Like what? (He looks around the room and smiles.)

You tell me. Do you want to improve your writing, reading?

E. My writing.

How will you do that?

E. Write more short stories.

O.K. What else? I know it's hard to think about this. [A pager begins to beep in the class. I turn away from the conference with Eric and speak to another student.] Turn that off please!

Student 1. It ain't on.

I can hear it. Just turn it off.

Student 1. It ain't on man.

Don't lie.

Student 2. [speaking to S1] Turn it off. It's off now.

Student 1. Why do you have to be so nasty. It ain't even on.

Thank you. [At this point, I turn to Eric and continue the conference.] What else? One more goal.
E. Read stories, too.

How about like reading more?

E. OK.

Eric, can you think anything that you would like to do in this in terms of projects that we haven't done in this class.

E. Not really.

Well I guess that's about it. (Eric picks up his portfolio and walks back to his seat.

This portfolio conference between Eric and me and the texts he has collected suggest two important aspects to Eric's view of assessment. First, his conception of assessment is tied to good grades and doing well on tests. Indicative of this is his inclusion of the two tests (which I note he scored '100%' on). Second, Eric believes 'getting my work done' is a further measure of his success. It's interesting when I ask him to set two goals for himself that he reaffirms 'good grades' and 'getting my work done' because these are goals that he has already reached. I attempt to shift the direction of the conference acknowledging that he has been successful in these areas and ask for something more personal, i.e., 'something you'd like to work on.' This is my attempt to connect the work Eric has included in his portfolio with larger issues of literacy development and get him to talk about process in the context of my agenda for portfolios. His response is a question that asks for clarification of meaning. At this point I suggest 'writing and reading,' which he picks up on and says back to me.
However, what's really interesting is the point in the conference in which I turn to speak to the other two students.

On one level, this is the type of situation that might be expected when conferencing with students during regular class time. However, from my social semiotic frame informed by a multiple perspectives, this break is much more provocative. From this perspective, it seems that Eric and I are performing this conference and constructing 'text/script' as a part of the larger part the culture of assessment in the classroom. Further, in the co-construction of this text, both Eric and I bring personal meaning systems to the conference, and we create rhetorical or interpretive space in which to discuss Eric's portfolio. The place in the text of the conference where I disrupt our conversation to re-enter the larger space of the classroom becomes my attempt to direct the drama in both spaces (Eric's and mine and the rest of the classroom) simultaneously. The two students who argue with me about the beeper construct a 'counterscript' that competes for interpretive space within the classroom community. Their action shifts the conversation away from the conference (Gutierrez et al., 1995b). Gutierrez and her colleagues argued:

> despite the inherent multi-voicedness of any classroom, student underlife generally maintains traditional classroom power relations. In this way, both students and teacher are complicit in maintaining distinct defensive spaces rather than challenging and ultimately transforming the dominant script. (p. 452)

The two students who argue with me create this counterscript with a pager as part of their meaning system by bringing the pager into the classroom and having someone call them. This act which results in my structuring a response that maintains
traditional ‘defensive’ student to teacher roles/spaces. Both the two students and I are complicit in ‘maintaining distinct defensive spaces’ in this classroom. In fact, it seems that my directive ‘don’t lie’ closes the space the students create with their counterscript.

Additionally, if the portfolio conference is viewed as a drama within the larger drama of the classroom, then this play within a play is being performed for the rest of the class. After I have spoken to the two students, I attempt to re-enter the dramatic space of the conference, but my question about ‘one more goal’ elicits a flat response from Eric, ‘read more,’ and I revise his response with the question. How about like ‘reading more.’ Interestingly, by constructing the counterscript, the two students position them against both Eric and me as co-constructors of the conference. The drama they pull me into competes with the drama of the portfolio conference. When I try to re-engage Eric in the conference, it appears that I am unsuccessful.

One possible interpretation of this classroom scene is that it is not uncommon for students to desire the attention of a teacher, and that the beeper going off was an attention-getting device on the part of that student. However, it is equally plausible that what was going on is much more complex. On a semiotic or meaning systems level, the student’s use of the beeper can be viewed as a way to gain power in the context of the classroom. Because this device is a part of the students’ world outside of school, it seems that he is inserting aspects of his world into the arena of schooling, the classroom. My attempt to direct both the conference and the rest of the students ends up subverting some of my goals of the portfolio conference. This type of practice,
while effectively enabling me to maintain control also fails to open up space for collaborative communication. As a classroom teacher, if I choose to schedule portfolio conferences with individual students as part of instruction, possible ‘interruptions’ are a reality. However, from a dramatic frame informed by social semiotics, the portfolio again becomes a site to examine how my classroom practices engender, reinforce, and maintain particular teacher-to-student relationships. These relationships are bound up with issues of power in the classroom, and my role as teacher and practices of assessment are constructed within the network of meaning systems produced by those interactions. It appears that the incident with the beeper again becomes a play within a play in which Eric’s role shifts from actor in a portfolio drama with me to an observer of this other drama taking place around the beeper. Despite my attempt to direct and manage the classroom activity, the student brings the beeper into the class to claim space for himself. Significant for understanding a culture of a classroom is to recognize that the dramas occurring within student-teacher interactions are not merely students ‘off task’ or ‘acting out.’ On another level, these dramas are about students creating space within a culture which, at times, directs their learning without much attention to their perspective.

In terms of Eric’s perspective on assessment, what emerges from the portfolio data is his emphasis on product over process and good grades over learning. Despite my agenda for the portfolio to open space for Eric to explore the ‘journey’ of his own writing and reading practices, he remains focused on end results. What is key to understanding the dynamics of a culture of assessment and Eric’s and my role in it is to
understand how our practices are part of a network of meaning systems which are simultaneously creating that culture.

The final chunk of data that figures into Eric's view of assessment are his responses to videotapes of portfolio conferences which took place between the other students in the class and me. As Sandra had, Eric used a form that I had created to facilitate the viewing and responding to the conferences.

For each conference, watch the interaction between the teacher and the student. Then, tell what you think is going on. You can write sentences, key words, or phrases if you like. I am interested in what you see and your interpretations.

Eric responded to three different conferences. I have preserved his original text.

**Conference #1.** 'His papers is out of order. It was quick.'

**Conference #2.** 'He was making facial expressions.'

**Conference #3.** [referring to 'C'] 'He moves around. He was ready. He smiles.'

Eric's staccato responses suggest that he notices how organized a student is for the conference. He writes three observations about Conference #3, and he notes that this student 'was ready," and records C's smile which suggests some satisfaction with the conference. Opposed to this are the other two conferences (#1 and #2) about which Eric writes two and one observations, respectively. He notes Student #1’s papers being out of order, how quickly the conference is over, and only Student #2’s facial expressions. From his understated observation, it can be argued that Eric views successful portfolio conferences as characterized by student preparation. This feature
of assessment dovetails with Eric’s emphasis on good grades and product-centered view of learning which emerges from his own portfolio.

Together, these data indicate the value of portfolios as sites for inquiry into the multilayered nature of a culture of assessment and the interactive roles both Eric and I develop within the construction of that culture. Eric’s view of assessment is constructed from/against interactions drawing on at least three meaning systems: (a) the community he has grown up in and within which he currently lives, (b) his previous educational/assessment experiences, and (c) the practices of assessment as they have been negotiated in this ninth grade English class. These meaning systems overlap and interconnect. Yet Eric’s portfolio provides a space for gaining insights into the interplay among them. This interplay can be glimpsed by focusing on Eric’s self-reflection. For example, at the end of the portfolio conference when I ask Eric to articulate ‘one more goal,’ he says, ‘read more,’ to which I respond, ‘how about like reading more?’ Eric’s response could be interpreted as an example of telling me what he thinks I want to hear. However, another interpretation is that this response of ‘getting more reading done’ draws from the views expressed by his mother on the need for independent work, from his previous schooling experiences in which testing and summative assessment were emphasized and rewarded, and finally from his experiences in this class. Each of these meaning systems interlace and figure into the construction of Eric’s view of assessment.

Emphasizing the value of self-reflection, Gardner (1992) reported on work with portfolios in the PROPEL Project (a collaborative venture involving Harvard Project
Zero, the Educational Testing Service, and the Pittsburgh public school system) and described the value of what he calls ‘process portfolios’:

By asking students to keep and review-process portfolios regularly, we hope to involve them in constant reflection on their activities and to allow them the opportunity to monitor and to learn from their own growth and even their own setbacks. (p. 104)

Gardner argued for the value of ongoing reflection as a way to facilitate learning. However, the reflectiveness he advocates is two-way. As classroom teacher, Eric’s portfolio also provides interpretive space to examine how his perspective figures into a construction of my role in a classroom-based assessment system. For example, during the conference when I enter the dramatic space of the student with the beeper, I am again fulfilling a role of the director marshaling student discourse to maintain my power in the classroom. This drama takes place within the drama of the conference with Eric and performs for him the practices of teacher control. My argument, as in previous examples, is not that this is necessarily ‘bad teaching.’ Rather, I am claiming that a culture of classroom-based assessment is a co-creation of multiple meaning systems dramatized within the practices of all stakeholders. As classroom teachers, how we assess one student, the scripts we articulate, and the interpretive space we open and close, all have implications for how we are able to assess an entire classroom of students.

Looking at assessment from this perspective allows me to view portfolios as places where Johnston (1992) argued, “Learning becomes a draft of knowledge
composition" (p. 132). This knowledge includes awareness of the how our own agendas figure into a production of the community I inhabit with students.

**Sam**

In the third case study, I continue to explore how this community is created by focusing on Sam. His portfolio and interactions with me suggests how work which by traditional standards would not receive high grades figures into the culture of assessment. Sam is a White male of European background ... tall and lanky and has brown hair which he keeps cut fairly short. Sam has two younger sisters and 'four half-brothers.' He lives with his mother and stepfather near the high school in an area called Southern Pines. Sam plays both baseball and football for the high school, and he collects sports cards which he would bring to school sometimes to trade with other collectors. Sam enjoyed elementary school. He explained, 'I made a lot of friends, and we just had fun.' However, he told me that he 'made bad grades' because 'I just fooled around all the time.' He remembers the third grade as his best year, because after that, some of his friends moved. In middle school, Sam struggled to earn good grades and studied to score high on tests. He remembers 'getting bad grades in seventh grade' and explained how he 'had to bring his history grade up to a C or be grounded for a week.' When I asked Sam whether he was able to raise his grade, he told me that 'my mom made me study. Sit down at the table all the time. I got that up from an F to a C.' Grades were an emphasis for Sam, and his parents insisted he keep his grades up. It seems they viewed them as a measure of his academic success.
As a reader, Sam's personal interest is sports. This is a selection from an interview in which we were discussing his reading outside of school:

So let me ask you a different kind of question. What sort of things do you like to read outside of school?

S. I really don't like to read. I think reading is boring because my eyes hurt. I need glasses. My mom didn't get em for me yet.

What about the sports page, newspaper, magazines?

S. I like to read the sports page. I read that everyday.

What's the first thing you look for when you open the sports page?

S. To see who's on and to see my favorite players and read them signs or something like that.

Do you read any magazines?

S. No.

Sports Illustrated, things like that?

S. Yeah, Sports Illustrated sometimes. And then, I read like - I just articles and different stuff that interests me.

What's your favorite thing to read about?

S. Sports.

It seems that what is immediately striking here is the comment by Sam, 'I really don't like to read' juxtaposed with 'I read the sports page. I read that everyday.' Suggested by these two responses is an implicit distinction Sam makes between reading as defined by the institutional practices of schooling and reading for information and enjoyment. Tied to this distinction is the teacher and student roles we assume in the drama of the interview. In an English class, asking about Sam's 'reading,' even though
I qualify it with 'outside school' still resonates with literary connotations. Reading in English class signifies literature. The practices of reading literature as traditionally defined by the discourse of schooling include teachers assigning literary selections for students to read, and then asking questions so that students can demonstrate they have successfully understood the text. It seems that for Sam, the reading of literature is 'boring,' and he needs him mom to get his 'glasses' to prevent reading from 'hurting his eyes.'

Contrasted to this notion of reading literature is Sam's avid, daily reading of the sports page. It appears that Sam finds reading interesting when it is about a topic that he likes. I am not suggesting that Sam's reading should only concern his interests in sports. However, as a classroom teacher, if one of my goals is to encourage lifelong reading, I need to think about how I create space for Sam to fold his personal reading interests into the reading experiences he has in my classroom.

In my classroom, Sam always sat in the first seat in the first row, although there were days when he put his head down on his desk as soon as he came into the room. When I asked him about why he was so tired he informed me that he had a paper route that he got up at 5:00 a.m. to complete before school. As a writer, Sam struggled to complete essays assigned in the class. The rough drafts he produced contained numerous spelling and other surface errors. Yet, if I encouraged him to complete his essays, he usually would. In this next selection of interview transcript, we are discussing his academic interests in general. As our conversation progresses, we began to talk about Sam's writing and his portfolio.
S. I used to do bad in English, but I've done better this year than I have ever done.

How do you think this has come to be? What would you say is the secret to your success?

S. Because I think it’s interesting. It’s more interesting than it has been because all my other teachers were boring.

I’ll take that as a compliment. I think you're doing pretty well, too. I know that you have worked hard this year. Sometime harder than others. You've done a good job. How is ninth grade ...you say you feel like you've done better in the ninth grade than you did previously.

S. Uhhuh.

Taken lots of tests this year.

S. Yes. Only I won’t pass.

How come?

S. They hurt me because I won’t study for it.

Why don’t you study?

S. Because I think I knows it.

And you find out you don’t know it huh?

S. Yeah.

You’ve kept up pretty well with your portfolio this year haven’t you.

S. Yeah.

Do you like keeping your work? Collecting it over the quarter, the year?

S. It doesn’t matter. It all depends if I feel like keeping the folder or not.

How do you decide whether you want to keep it?
S. If I think I done good.
And the ones you don’t feel you’ve done good’?
S. Yeah. I just throw them away.
You don’t think you can learn from your mistakes?
S. I never thought about that before.

In terms of gaining insights into Sam’s perception of himself as a writer and how these perceptions figure into a construction of a culture of classroom-based assessment, two significant issues emerge from this exchange between us. First, Sam believes that, for him, English is more interesting than in previous years, and that because of this, he has ‘done better this year.’ Second, his portfolio only contains the writing and other work he thinks he has done well. It seems that Sam links success and ‘good writing’ with getting good grades. It is difficult to tell based on these data how much he invests in his work. However, the institution of school rewards good grades, and Sam recalls how his parents ‘threatened to ground him’ if he didn’t bring his grades up in the seventh grade. Sam throws away the pieces of writing that he has not received a good grade on in my class. This behavior of throwing away papers not receiving high marks is not unusual for students.

However, as a language arts teacher trying to focus on writing processes, I work in a discourse system that primarily rewards products. By discourse system, I mean the practices, inferences, and values constructed by the school system as it seeks to organize its approaches to educating students. Mislevy (1993) drew on Kuhn’s (1970)
work on the nature of paradigms to argue for a reconceptualization of testing theory. He maintains that current testing theory creates ‘network of conjectures’ which guide evaluation thus constructing a ‘universe of discourse’ governing what types of decisions and inferences can be made regarding assessment (p. 1). Similarly, the practices of schooling create a discourse system which frames both pedagogical approaches of teachers and the educational experiences of students. The school system in which this study was undertaken administers proficiency testing at 4th-, 9th-, and 12th-grade levels. These tests directly influence curriculum and the types of things teachers actually do with students in classrooms. Therefore, as a classroom teacher, my attempts to include alternative assessment within that system encounter resistance on multiple levels. First, on a system level, even though there is much lip-service paid to teaching writing and reading processes, all three tests include portion in which only the final product determines whether a student passes. Second, on a family level, parents expectations are shaped by a discourse in which it is primarily their students’ product that matters. Third, these system and family expectations are communicated to individual students. In terms of a culture of assessment, these relationships suggest that a student’s view of assessment is constructed so that he expects assessment to be procedures in which that he has little if any voice. Grades are an outcome of such procedures. In such a context, it is not surprising that asking Sam to reflect on his writing assignments and other work over an extended period of time falls flat. The
meaning systems which construct Sam’s view of learning provide not space for this type of question.

Similar issues emerged from data collected from Sam’s mother, Debra. Sam’s parents have lived in the community for 15 years. Debra completed a survey of her attitudes toward education and assessment. Overall, Debra believes that the school communicates about her son’s progress to her home ‘somewhat.’ In elaborating on this comment, she explains ‘the interim report might be good, but he might bring home a D on his report card.’ Interim reports are sent home in the middle of each 9-week grading period. Debra seemed somewhat frustrated with Sam’s refusal to discuss his schoolwork with her. Also, she told me that, although she and her husband offered their assistance in helping Sam study for quizzes and tests, he doesn’t ‘seek them out.’

As a parent, she believes her son has the opportunity to get a good education at this high school but that not all students take advantage of the opportunity. She worries that ‘it is easier for some teachers to pass a student rather than make them earn it.’ Overall, she explained:

I feel frustrated. I’ve tried making my son do his homework, bring home books, have a logbook signed by his teachers, punishment, etc. I finally told him he had to be responsible for himself; that he was old enough to know what he needs to do. He still brings home low grades. I don’t know what else to do.

Interestingly, her concern with grades has figured into Sam’s view of what counts as ‘good work.’ His consciousness of a good grade at the exclusion of everything else seems directly tied to the views his parents have of schooling. In a culture of assessment that uses portfolios as a foundation of its practices, there seems to
be a collision of meaning systems. The emphasis on process and self reflection is a key feature of working with portfolios. Sam resists my view and sees the portfolio as a place only to collect the assignments he has received high grades on in the class. This view is reinforced by the stance and concerns articulated by his parents.

I am not arguing that his parents’ emphasis on grades is necessarily a mistaken approach. What I am claiming is that simply placing portfolios within a classroom culture and expecting students to readily and easily see their value is somewhat naive about the ways students’ views are constructed by multiple meaning systems. In this case, Sam’s focus on ‘getting good grades’ is supported/reinforced by both his parents and the systems of schooling. Because Sam was involved in sports, grades figured directly into his eligibility. Failure to keep his grades at certain level (overall, a GPA of 2.0) removes the privilege of participation in sports and creates the condition of ineligibility. His parents also remove privileges by grounding Sam for a poor academic performance. Ironically, Sam is not that successful at ‘getting good grades’ and throws out the papers receiving low marks as if this will somehow erase his poor performance. From a dramatic perspective, it seems as if Sam is acting the part of a ‘good student’ within the drama of the classroom, yet his portrayal is somewhat problematic. What is problematic is his reluctance to revise his work to raise his grades, yet he also resists the process of reflection I try to draw him into in the context of the portfolio. In a sense, Sam’s grades become signs of both his conformity within the discourse or logonomic system of schooling (Hodge & Kress, 1988) and his resistance within the context of classroom-based assessment. In this next section, I
want to interrogate more closely Sam’s views of assessment by examining his portfolio and how it figures into roles constructed within the culture of assessment.

**Sam’s View of Assessment.**

As with the two previous case studies, I am analyzing Sam’s portfolio (which includes the conference) to ferret out Sam’s view of assessment and explore how Sam’s interactions with me, in the context of the portfolio, contribute to the construction of my role as the classroom teacher. Sam’s middle school portfolio (Table 7) includes (a) computer-generated descriptions of mastery of pupil performance objectives for writing at grade 5 and reading at grade 6, (b) a Primary Trait Formative Test for Grade 7 which asked him to answer question about ‘King Midas and the Golden Touch,’ (c) four ‘Writing Activities’ (numbered 3, 9, 10, and 32) in which he responded to a preset prompt, (d) five questions in response to a story; and a piece of writing entitled, “The Unforgettable Island.”

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Table 7
Sam’s Middle School Portfolio

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In Sam’s middle school portfolio, there are five pieces of writing ... four are short responses to preset prompts on a worksheet, and one is a story he wrote without any directions attached to it. From this collection, it is possible to surmise that he did have teachers who required him to produce some texts. However, it is not clear whether he chose these himself or whether the teacher chose them for him. My guess it that they were chosen for him because there is no self-reflection component included in this portfolio.

Sam’s 9th-grade portfolio (Table 8) includes work he collected over the entire year. It includes (a) Book Detective, the first assignment of the school year, (b) a journal with 11 entries collected over the entire year, (c) an essay test over a short story unit, (d) responses to questions about “Romeo and Juliet,” (e) a writing assignment on Family Traditions (a preliminary and final draft), (f) an essay responding to a book, Baseball’s Hall of Shame, by Bradmen, and (g) a Final Folder/Portfolio Evaluation Form which he completed at the end of the school year. Interestingly, the basketball story he mentions in the conference below was not in the folder when he finally gave it to me. For some reason, he decided to remove this particular story.
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Sam's 9th-Grade Portfolio

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<td>End-of-year self-evaluation</td>
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The portfolio as I have characterized it also includes the conference I had with Sam in which we discussed his work in the context of his literacy and language growth. The following is a transcription of the conference we had at the end of the year. It took place during regular class time and was videotaped by another student in the class.

So, Sam, let's talk about your portfolio or folder.

S. I've kept some of my best stories.

What do you mean your best stories?

S. Like, this one.

Tell me about this one.

S. This is bout when I was little... umm... its sports

Baseball story?

S. Basketball story.

Basketball. So is this a true story?

S. A little.
So you changed it when you wrote it?

S. Yeah...Uh huh I changed it some. [At his point there is a rustling of papers and Sam looks at his portfolio and says nothing.]

So let's talk about your work in this class. You feel you've improved? Done some good writing in this class?

S. In all my tests, I've got good grades.

Let me ask you a different question. If you were going to identify something about your reading and writing you would like to improve, what would it be?

S. My handwriting. It's sloppy. [On the videotape I show signs of frustration, restlessness with this conference]

What about something besides handwriting? [At this point he attempts to put all his papers back into the portfolio] Let me take another look at that. You got some good work here. You know, I'm not so much concerned about handwriting. Yours is better than mine. I'd like you to think about writing style, voice, or your goals as a writer?

S. Uh huh.

OK, how do you feel about keeping a portfolio?

S. It doesn't matter to me.

On my original transcription of this conference, I wrote 'what a performance' at the end of this exchange. At the time, I believe I was commenting on a dramatization of resistance on Sam's part. However, upon reexamination of these data, I am struck by my own performance as well. It seems the more I attempt to engage Sam with some sort of interpretation about his literacy growth, the more determined he resists, despite the fact that the contents of the portfolio are fairly diverse. His inclusion of his journal (which has entries over the entire year), two writing assignments, an essay test, as well
as other work plus his self-evaluation set the potential for a strong conference in which we discuss his work involving different modes. Sam, initially, focuses on a story he wrote about basketball when he was younger. I attempt to connect his writing of the story with personal experience by asking if the story is 'true,' and try to get him to talk about how he changed it as he textualized the experience. He responds, 'a little,' which I don’t push any further. I simply let it drop and then move on to a question about goal setting. Both of us are actors within the drama of the portfolio conference which is within the dramatization of the classroom culture.

The interplay among these dramas is marshaled by multiple meaning systems. On one hand, Sam’s parents’ emphasis on good grades has played an important role in the construction of his view of assessment. Coupled closely with this is the institutions of schooling, which base Sam’s eligibility to participate in sports on his overall grade point average. Although I desire the portfolio to become a site where Sam really examines his own reading, writing, and by implication, assessment experiences, this is not the drama that develops. Sam’s resistance contributes the construction of my traditional role as classroom teacher. By traditional, I mean that I control the flow and structure of discourse within the portfolio conference. It is interesting that the story that Sam mentions is not in the final portfolio. It is possible that he may have lost it. On the other hand, it is equally possible that Sam never believed his portfolio went beyond the classroom to connect with his personal experience. Therefore, he only placed work in his portfolio that fits with traditional values of school. The story he mentions seems to have meant something to him. Yet, when I try to connect this story
to an evaluative statement about his writing. ‘So let’s talk about your work in this class? You feel you’ve improved? Done some good writing in this class?’ He immediately returns to tests and grades. This brings the issue of ownership of student portfolios to the fore. Sam’s portfolio remains one more site where his assignments and tests are kept, and it appears that he feels little or no investment. Sam doesn’t own the portfolio. Researchers (Tierney et al., 1991) addressed this issue of ownership:

In some classrooms, the student work folders belong to the teacher. The teacher assigns all the reading and writing tasks, grades all the assigned work, and chooses the pieces that are to be placed in the student folder. A primary reason for the portfolio however is to engage the student in a new level of involvement. (p. 70)

In this case, even though Sam has chose his pieces of work, he doesn’t take ownership for the portfolio. From his ‘resistance’ to the version of a portfolio I have brought into the classroom, significant insights into Sam’s views of assessment and how those views figure into a culture of assessment in this classroom emerge. In his ethnographic study of ritual and its role in the instructional discourses of schooling, McLaren (1986) pointed out that the central place of resistance in student to teacher interactions when he refers to it as “the dominant social drama” which students used to subvert the instructional practices of teachers (p. 223). If the portfolio conference is viewed as a play within the drama of the classroom in which multiple meaning systems converge as stakeholders negotiate the value of student work, Sam’s resistance can be perceived as a ‘counterscript’ to my teacher script. These scripts collide in the context of classroom based assessment. For Sam, the portfolio remains a teacher-driven instructional practice which ‘doesn’t matter to him.’ Yet, this interpretation of his
resistance is significant for suggesting a portfolio’s value as a site for looking at the multiple layers of meaning that contribute to seemingly ordinary student actions and attitudes. In this case, Sam’s resistance to my instructional practices indicate how the meaning system his parents have constructed around grades and testing align with one of Sam’s goals in school (get good grades to maintain eligibility in sports) to create his views of assessment. I view a portfolio as a new window into/out of literacy acquisition. Against this view, Sam constructs a counterscript which posits portfolios as a folder to archive only his work which received a good grade.

As a classroom teacher, considering portfolios as windows through which I can better understand how my assumptions about learning and instructional practices collide with meaning systems of students is eye opening. It opens my eyes to the complexities of creating classrooms with students that meet diverse needs of all. As a teacher-researcher, it suggests looking more carefully at ways student literacy is bound up in the networks of culture and how increased awareness of those networks may lead to more informed classroom-based assessment practices.

The final part of Sam’s view of assessment in this study is his interpretations of the portfolio conferences. Sam commented on three conferences, his own and those of two other students. As previously, I asked Sam to use a preset form to observe the conferences on videotape. ‘The directions state that you can write sentences, key words, or phrases if you like. I am interested in what you see and your interpretations.” These are Sam’s responses.
Conference #1. ‘Sean – good writing – Improvement on work’

Conference #2. ‘Scott – improvement’

Conference #3. ‘Chuck – needs to speak up.’

It appears that Sam uses key words in the first two responses to describe what he sees as a major point or focus of the conference. The third conference was with Chuck (Sam’s best friend) and me. Sam makes a possibly sarcastic comment, ‘needs to speak up’ about this conference. Sam’s comments are interpretive in the sense that all description is interpretive because it selects from what’s available in a given scene. Yet, like his comments on his portfolio, Sam resists going beyond listing descriptors to more reflective comments on student-teacher interaction. Certainly it is possible that this type of response was new for Sam, and he doesn’t write much because that way there is little risk for making a mistake. However, even if this is the case, this connects with other facets of Sam’s views of assessment. Sam’s grade-oriented view of assessment may not include interpretive space to take a risk and comment extensively on interactions he observes between me and other students. I had hoped that the open-ended response format would provide space for Sam to reflect on interaction; he chose to minimally describe outcomes. Yet again his resistance suggests the difficulty in moving beyond the values constructed by the meaning systems creating and informing a classroom. In their work on the nature of classroom culture, researchers Gutierrez et al. (1995b) remarked:

In most classrooms, what counts as learning and who has access to his learning is determined by the values of the local culture and larger
society and by particular beliefs and practices evident in the social spaces of the classroom. (p. 445)

By analogy, these data in this case study indicate that similar generalizations can be made about Sam’s view of assessment and its relationship to a culture of assessment in this classroom. In other words, part of what counts as assessment and how assessment practices function in a classroom, is constructed by the values stakeholders bring from local cultures. These personal values interlace with what is valued by the culture of schooling and are part of the process of the constituting of the culture of assessment. Portfolios then, become sites of both change and resistance to change. For Sam, the portfolio functions as a site of resistance to my attempts to bring self-reflection and a type of ‘meta-awareness’ his literacy development. What’s interesting here is not that my goals were wrong or right. As a teacher-researcher, I still believe engaging students in a critical explorations of their own learning, reading, and writing processes are pedagogically sound. However, an examination of the portfolio within a cultural context allows me to resist merely labeling this student as ‘lazy,’ ‘unmotivated,’ or ‘uninterested.’ Rather, it enables me to gain insights into the sociocultural processes and systems of meaning underpinning classroom practices.

In a sense, Sam acts the part of the student that he perceives the system wants him to be. Yet, ironically his performance and his resistance to looking closely at his own meaning making processes prevent him from really growing as a learner. Furthermore, my role as a teacher exists dialogically (Bakhtin, 1981) to Sam’s. How I attempt to open and close the interpretive spaces in the culture of assessment by
controlling the discourse structures in a classroom resonates with Sam’s views of learning and assessment. During my teacher script in the portfolio conference, I desire to be an actor with Sam as we explore the nature of his portfolio. However, I remain the director, frustrated by his responses to my questions. Little or no negotiation takes place. This play within a drama of classroom culture suggests that analyzing a portfolio is a educational process which potentially impacts a classroom teacher as much as a student. Portfolios, as sites of resistance, may function as a catalyst to re-imagine different roles for both. In the next chapter, I will consider these roles in some detail.

**Tammy**

In this final case study, I will look at a student for whom the portfolio worked as a way for her to explore her individual strengths and literacy development. She was able to view the portfolio as more than a folder. For her, it became a site where she could both showcase work of which she was proud and look thoughtfully at how literacy functioned. Tammy, an African-American student, is a athletic girl with long legs and arms and short hair which she keeps combed back off her face. She played basketball, and even as a freshman, she distinguished herself as a key player for the girls team. Also, she was on the track team and was considered among the top female sprinters in the City League. As a student in my class, Tammy worked very hard at improving her writing and reading skills. Somewhat outspoken, Tammy voiced strong opinions during class discussions and at times even would lose her temper with other
students in the class. She lives with her mom and older brother on the south side of the city. Tammy also has an older brother who attends The Ohio State University and lives in a dormitory. She was born in Virginia and went to kindergarten and first grade in Virginia schools before she moved to Columbus, Ohio.

Tammy attended two different elementary schools in Columbus. She remembers liking elementary school because ‘we got so many recesses,’ and they made learning fun. It was not ‘you sit there and you talk about stuff. They make things interesting so you won’t be all bored and don’t be in trouble.’ Tammy liked drawing and math ‘because she got to do things.’ She seems to like hands-on learning experiences. In middle school, she explained, “It was fun. It was like the same experience, but it just got a little bit harder. I liked it because the teacher was into what she was doing and if you needed help, they would help you out.” During her 9th-grade year, Tammy echoed the same theme of having teachers care about her, and then she commented, ‘some teachers give you a little bit of extra stuff. What you’re going to need to learn later on.’ As a reader and writer, a lot of what Tammy does is connected to her participation in sports. Even as a 9th-grader, she was already getting letters from schools interested in her athletic ability. Note this exchange from an interview I conducted with her:

Do you do much reading and writing outside of school?

T. Yeah, I have to. For instance, in basketball letters you’ve got to write a lot of stuff because you’re in the 9th and 10th grade and the only thing they can do...they can write to you. They can’t see you face to face. So you have to do a lot of reading and writing.
They can’t recruit you, but they can write you and let you know-

T. They can let you know they interested right now, but then when you get like 11th grade, that’s when they can stop writing letters and stuff.

So, you write back to these places?

T. Yeah. Sort of. A lot depends-like last week, I got four letters, and then you’ve got to wrote them all back. Try and send them as fast as you can and you can’t have a lot of mistakes and stuff like that.

So that’s kind of important. Do you get letters for both track and basketball?

T. Yeah.

What’s interesting here that Tammy is quite aware of how writing can be used functionally. She is aware of both deadlines (‘try and send them back as fast as you can’) and the issues of grammatical correctness (‘you can’t have a lot of mistakes’) as part of what writing is about. As a reader, Tammy reads ‘mostly like sports books.’ She reads books about the lives of sports stars like Michael Jordan. She explained, “I like reading about how their life was, and then I look at mine and it seems like the same way.” She believes that the media distorts sports figures lives and ‘the only way your going to find out is by reading something.’ Tammy seems to view reading as a more trustworthy authority that other forms of media. Also, based on her comments about reading and responding to the letters of interest from college recruiters, it appears that Tammy connects reading and writing as mutually informative processes.

Another characteristic of Tammy is she really values feedback on her writing. In one interview I conducted with her, I commented that I thought her writing had
improved over the school year. Note the statements that emerge from this selection of the transcript:

I think your writing has really improved this year quite a bit.

T. Yeah, cause last year-

What?

T. Yeah it improved cause last year I really didn’t have no English teacher that I liked.

What do you mean?

T. We wrote, but it seemed like he didn’t really like correct nothing, and I didn’t know if it was right or if it was wrong. Now like when I come I see little mistakes I use in my grammar and stuff.

It’s hard to read your own work really carefully sometimes.

T. Yeah, that’s why I just give it to my older brother or something and ask him to read it. Stuff like that cause he knows – he’s in college. He knows what mistakes you make.

Seeking feedback on her writing from her older brother and valuing a teacher who provides some critique of her works suggest that Tammy actively tries to develop her writing abilities. Overall, Tammy seems to be a student who has some sense of personal goals and recognizes the value of her education in assisting her toward reaching those goals.

The survey about an assessment that I gave was completed by Tammy’s father. He declined to be interviewed by telephone and wished to remain anonymous in this study. Tammy’s father has lived in his present community for 12 years. He is generally satisfied with the quality of education his daughter is receiving as a high
school student. Although he discusses his daughter's school work with her, he doesn't feel it is necessary to help her study. He does, however, want leaning to 'be fun for her.' Tammy's father opposes the 9th-Grade Proficiency Test as a graduation requirement because he believes 'some people just have poor test results.' He supports his daughter's participation in both basketball and track, and he believes that they contribute on some level to the overall quality of Tammy's education. Although his responses to the survey were not extensive, it appears the Tammy's father genuinely wants his daughter to be successful in high school.

Tammy is the type of student who had support systems. She had the support of being a successful athlete. Not only was she member of two teams (track and basketball) that provided structure in the form of study tables on ongoing grade checks, but she also had colleges and universities contacting her as a 9th-grader. Also, the 9th-grade counselor had taken a particular interest in her and would often stop me in the hallway or at lunch to inquire about her progress, or relate some detail about Tammy to me. In a sense, these support systems helped her negotiate the role of student successfully. As a case study, I was interested in how Tammy, whose experiences seemed to be primarily positive, might dramatize the role of a student in a classroom where portfolios are central to assessment practices. Also, I became interested in how Tammy's views and perceptions of assessment figured into both my views of assessment and a culture of assessment in the classroom. In this next section, I will profile Tammy's portfolio and characterize how multiple meaning systems interplay within the context of that portfolio.
Tammy's View of Assessment.

Tammy's view of assessment emerges from her portfolio and interviews I conducted with during class. I was unable to obtain Tammy's middle-school portfolio. The folder from her middle school has her name on it, but it is empty. However, the portfolio she kept for my class provides a range of her work. Her 9th-grade portfolio includes (a) personal essays she wrote defining 'Freedom,' 'Personal Courage,' and 'The Love of Track,' (b) a research paper she completed entitled, "Black Colleges," (c) a parody she wrote of the Wizard of Oz, (d) 'Lil Swoops,' (e) her final exam essay on a biography of Michael Jordan, (f) her final year-end portfolio evaluation, and (g) her comments on the videotaped portfolio conferences of three students in the class. Table 9 indicates the variety of work in Tammy's portfolio.

Table 9
Tammy's 9th-Grade Portfolio

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>Class, writing assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Courage</td>
<td>Class, writing assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Love of Track</td>
<td>Class, writing assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Colleges</td>
<td>9-weeks' research project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lil Swoops</td>
<td>Class, writing assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay of biography of Michael Jordan</td>
<td>Final exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videotape responses</td>
<td>Interpretation of student conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-evaluation of portfolio</td>
<td>Year-end reflection/assessment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Each of these pieces includes a first and revised draft with my comments. Tammy worked hard on all her writing and was proud of her work. It seems clear that Tammy follows through on assignments once she is engaged. During a portfolio conference, I asked her about keeping her folder. She told me:

T. Yeah, I like it. Some teachers make mistakes. This way I keep stuff, and I can show my mom.

You show your mom your portfolio? That's great.

For her, keeping a portfolio provides evidence of what has been done. Also, this same evidence makes sure she gets a fair grade because some teachers make mistakes. Also, Tammy shows her portfolio to her mother to showcase assignments. My surprise at finding this out is interesting. Throughout the school year, I had attempted to get students to show their portfolio to their parents. My agenda was to involve parents in students' literacy acquisition and engage them as a stakeholder in assessing their student's development. However, there was resistance from numerous students (including the first three case study subjects), and it seemed as if students believed that I was trying to get them in trouble with their parents or caregivers.

As a result, when Tammy explains that she voluntarily shares her portfolio with her mother, I am surprised. My surprise is a construction of my interactions with students throughout the school year in which a parent involvement portion of my portfolio agenda was not realized. This could be glossed over as an instructional goal that failed. However, another interpretation may be that against a 'text' or script I imagined of parents having a dialogue with their student, some students constructed a
counterscript. This counterscript may be characterized by their desire to keep their school work separate from their relationship with their parents and maintain traditional roles for themselves and me as the classroom teacher. Gutierrez et al. (1995a) called this "a scripted pact" (p. 418) and argued that both stakeholders were complicit in maintaining traditional roles and power relations. Although my interpretation is speculative, it suggests that, as teachers, if we deconstruct the motives and meanings we have for assessment practices and their underlying assumptions, we gain insights into how our intentions script our interactions with students. From such insights, we could begin to construct a third interpretive space where our scripts might be renegotiated and new classroom roles articulated. In this case, my underlying assumptions about portfolios shaped the nature of the portfolio conference between Tammy and I in a particular way.

Tammy's portfolio includes the conference we had to talk about her development over the year. This particular conference took place during class time and was videotaped by a student in the class. In this exchange, multiple meaning systems are dramatized within the boundaries of the portfolio. By boundaries I mean the network of practices that characterize the portfolio. These include my oral and written instructions for collecting and organizing contents of the portfolio, my agenda for the portfolio as part of a culture of assessment in the classroom, as well as Tammy's attitudes and perceptions toward assessment.
Portfolio Conference with Tammy.

O.K. Tell me about your folder.

T. Well... I got all my graded papers.

[I turn to class and address them directly...I can’t compete with you. If you’ve already had your conference, continue working. If not, I’ll get to you as soon as I can.] O.K. so, this is your best work?

T. Yeah... I like these stories.

Let’s talk about goals. If you had to choose one thing to work on ...

T. I think my stories. Try to write something more exciting.

I think you write pretty exciting stories. [I turn to class again...Uh...could you quiet down please.] How do you feel about keeping a folder? Do you like keeping a portfolio?

T. No... I mean yeah...I like it. Some teachers make mistakes. This way I keep stuff, and I can show my mom.

You show your mom your folder, that’s great. What else do you want to talk about? Anything else you want to say?

T. No, that’s about it I guess.

O.K. I guess that is it then. Thanks. [Tammy gets up and returns to her seat]

From this portfolio data, several important features of Tammy’s perspective on assessment emerge. The opening exchange between us in which I ask her to ‘tell me about your folder’ and she responds ‘I got all my graded papers’ suggests that she views her portfolio as a place where she keep all her ‘graded papers’ as opposed to other types of work. Interestingly, I believed it necessary to turn and tell the class ‘I can’t compete with you’ which seems to indicate that I believe that in the portfolio
conference, I am competing with the larger group. Then, I reenter the discourse space of the conference and shift the conversation from the descriptive 'tell me about your folder' to the evaluative question, 'this your best work?' Tammy's affirmative, 'yeah, I like ... these stories' seems to point to her ability to recognize the quality of her own work. In retrospect, I might have pursued what Tammy 'liked' about her stories, but I immediately move to a question about goal setting. Tammy's response to my question about choosing something to work on is 'to try and write something more exciting.' Tammy seemingly believes that creating excitement in a narrative is desirable and hopes to strive towards that goal.

However, it is the last portion of the conference which reveals the most about Tammy's view of assessment and suggests how my agenda for portfolios contributes to the drama of this conference. Rather than explore with Tammy how she might write more exciting stories, I discount her statement with the comment, 'I think you write pretty exciting stories,' and then 'leave the discourse space of the portfolio conference to make a plea to the larger group to quiet down.' As in the previous exchange, when I reenter the discourse of the portfolio conference, I ask a new question that shifts the direction of the conference away from individual goals toward evaluating how she liked her portfolio as a whole. Her responses about 'some teachers making mistakes' suggest that she understands assessment and grades as evidence that may need to be used to show what she has really earned. Also, her statement about 'keeping stuff' so that she can 'show her mom' points to her sense of the portfolio as something she showcases.
On one level, this conference can be interpreted as fairly positive. Tammy acknowledges the value of keeping a portfolio and states that she willingly shares it with her mother. However, if this conference is viewed from a dramatic frame informed by social semiotics and critical discourse theory, it is possible to articulate a competing interpretation. In sense, the drama of this conference remains an 'affirming rehearsal' of my own agenda for portfolios rather than a dramatic exploration of the worth of a portfolio for Tammy. Both times, when I exit the interpretive space of the conference to speak to the class, I reenter the conference and proceed as if my question has already been answered. While Tammy is polite and each time responds to my new question, this structure of discourse closes off 'dramatic asides' as opportunities to probe and explore her comments and tends to move the conference along to a quick ending. It appears from the transcript data, that, once I have established that Tammy's portfolio experience matches my own view of portfolios, I bring the conference to a close with the question, 'anything else you want to say?' Considering how I have shifted and reshifted the pattern of questions, it is not surprising that Tammy responds, 'no, that's about it I guess.'

What is significant for relationships among classroom-based assessment practices and student teacher interactions is the importance of critically interrogating how we construct and dramatize both our 'successes' with students as well as more problematic experiences. Part of my interpretation of Tammy's 'positive experience' with her portfolio is a construction of intersections between her comments and my assessment agenda which wants a portfolio to function as a 'new window' into/out of a
student’s literacy acquisition. It seems that in my haste to affirm that my vision for portfolios has worked with this student, I script a role in the portfolio conference that closes rather than opens interpretive space. As a classroom teacher, it is important to question how my role in the conference placed Tammy in the role of passive respondent to my questions rather than active explorer of her own literacy processes. From a dramatic perspective, we are rehearsing a play (which is aligned with my perceptions of assessment) within the larger cultural drama of the classroom. When the drama the other students are engaged in impinges on our ‘rehearsal,’ as director I tell the other ‘actors’ that I will ‘get to you as soon as I can.’ It seems plausible that I assume my questions to Tammy have been answered because I am anxious to conclude a portfolio conference in which I have already decided the portfolio worked. As a result, part of the responsibility and challenge of a teacher-researcher is to become aware of how the interplay of multiple meaning systems problematize seemingly straightforward interactions with our students. In this case, the meaning systems include my agenda for portfolios within the practices of classroom assessment, my role as classroom teacher, and my orientation and goals as a researcher. For Tammy, the realization that writing and reading can have functional value, her own past educational experiences, and her history of interactions in this classroom intersect to inform her views of assessment in the context of the practices of portfolio-based assessment. Both of these networks of meaning systems interact within the logonomic system of schooling. As a result, the play we construct within the portfolio conference is
characterized by affirmation rather than exploration. In other words, I seem to direct the conference as if the value of the portfolio is already determined and settled as opposed to considering it as an opportunity to inquire further into processes of Tammy's literacy development. My point is not to diminish Tammy's recognition of the usefulness of portfolios; however, it seems that, in this case, my director role limits the direction the conference takes. Therefore, Tammy's role in the conference is constructed by my situating her as a 'successful student' who has gained from working with a portfolio.

The final piece of data that contributes to an understanding of Tammy's perspective on assessment is her interpretation of videotaped portfolio conferences. As in the three previous cases, Tammy viewed three conferences and used a preset form to interpret what she saw in terms of teacher and student interaction. I have preserved her original form and spelling in the presentation of these responses:

**Conference #1.** 'organizing papers, tell things he wants to do better,'

**Conference #2.** 'he gets out best work, face expressions, setting grade'

**Conference #3.** 'grading comments, telling him what he did good, smiling in camera.'

Tammy's responses to the conferences focus on both assessment practices, 'organizing papers,' 'setting grade,' and 'grading comments' as well as student and teacher behavior. Her descriptive interpretations of these conferences are relatively straightforward yet connect to my analysis of her portfolio in two significant ways. First, all of her comments about these conferences are positive and suggest that,
because her own experience was positive, she views portfolio conferences as a good feature of classroom based assessment. Second, in conference 2 and 3, she mentions grades, as in the opening of her own portfolio conference, ‘I got all my graded papers.’ Pushing the dramatic metaphor of ‘affirmative rehearsal’ further, it can be argued that Tammy’s perspective on assessment includes an understanding of grading within a portfolio context as ‘practice performance’ or ‘rehearsal’ for receiving grades at the end of the marking period. Tammy, then, has internalized a view of assessment (possibly from sports participation and other sociocultural experiences) that values practicing and rehearsing as one of its features. This facet of her perspective on assessment resonates with her sense of herself as reader and writer; both function in the service of larger goals. For Tammy, classroom-based assessment is part of rehearsing for getting good grades, which is part of preparing to graduate to go on to college. Similarly, her reading and writing includes letters received from and written to colleges expressing interest in Tammy attending those schools. Also, her portfolio includes a piece a biography of Michael Jordan, essays “Love of Track” and “Black Colleges” and “Lil Swoops,” which is drama about basketball. Clearly, there are linkages among her reading and writing and her personal goals. In a way, these linkages may be rehearsals for the futures she is imagining for herself.

Overall, Tammy seems to perceive assessment as integrated with her notions about school and learning. She doesn’t fear assessment and believes that, if the work of a portfolio is completed, assessment is a way to rehearse receiving positive outcomes.
for what has already been earned. Such an attitude dovetails with my expectations portfolios in classroom-based assessment.

Yet, as a classroom teacher, working with a student like Tammy in a portfolio system calls attention to the need for looking closely at interactions with students whose outlooks match ours. It may be easier from an instructional point of view to involve such students in affirmative rehearsals of self-assessment rather than really examine the processes of their literacy growth. However, such drama does not challenge either student or teacher to carefully reflect on the nature of their learning. It this case, the portfolio serves as a site to deconstruct this affirming interaction. This deconstruction reveals that understanding how to best foster literacy with students may necessitate confronting how our own theoretic and pedagogic agendas narrow our assessment practices. From such confrontations, awareness of a type of reverse self-fulfilling prophecy emerges. Rather than view a student as incapable of succeeding and then constructing a learning situation or environment guaranteeing failure, the student is constructed as an exemplar of assessment theories or agendas I favor. Either way, a teachers’ effective assessment of students’ literacy development may be compromised. Finally, tensions exist among how students and teachers construct their roles in a classroom and the practices those roles engender. These tensions include relationships between views of assessment and views of learning, relationships between views of assessment and views of knowledge, and relationships between views of assessment and views of literacy. Recognition of portfolios sites where a classroom teacher, together with students, reflects on how understanding such tensions might
improve literacy education for all stakeholders extends the value of portfolios in classroom-based assessment systems. Such improvements could shift assessment practices toward a system in which closer ties among teaching and learning are negotiated by all stakeholders.

**Dramatic Threads Across Four Case Studies**

From my analyses, four important findings emerge across case studies for using portfolios as a center for a classroom-based assessment system. These finding can be categorized by what I call four dramatic threads:

1. Assessment, dramatized within a culture of a classroom, emerges from layers of interactions between students and the classroom teacher.

2. Within the drama of assessment, a portfolio functions as a site to deconstruct how multiple meaning systems are layered within the practices of assessment.

3. Differences in the language and discourse structures in negotiations involving portfolios are related to gender, and these differences shape the evaluation of the portfolio in specific ways.

4. Resistance emerges as a construct for both students and teachers in a drama of assessment, and indicates the complexity of classroom-based assessment.

In the last section of this chapter, I will fully explore the nature and implications of these findings.
In her book on feminist research, Lather (1991) described her agenda to “write science differently” (p. 123). She recognized that shifting the discourse of research toward a feminist/postmodern perspective necessitates constructing new ways of presenting results of research and developing new language to describe those results. Lather composes “four narrative vignettes” to represent her findings about students’ experiences in a feminist research class in which she was the instructor. In a similar fashion, my goal is to demonstrate how my research findings are threads of a larger fabric of meaning that is constructed and reconstructed within the drama of classroom life. Therefore, I have chosen to characterize these findings on classroom-based assessment as “dramatic threads” woven into a larger fabric of classroom culture and learning.

**Thread 1.**

Assessment, dramatized within a culture of a classroom, emerges from layers of interactions between students and the classroom teacher.

Within each case study, assessment is dramatized in the classroom as the student and I assume roles that are constituted by a convergence of meaning systems. For example, Sandra’s interactions regarding assessment are constituted by what I label her ‘well-versed’ understanding of the traditional student role. In Sandra’s case, this understanding is characterized by emphasis on product completion and a separation of her school writing and reading from pleasurable writing and reading. Also, her mothers’ faith in proficiency testing to account for and direct student learning in a
positive way, informs Sandra’s understanding and articulations of her student role. Further, my teacher-director role constructs and is constructed by Sandra’s traditional student role. As a result, our teacher-to-student interactions rehearse a drama that stages traditional views of schooling. Although I appear to direct the drama, the real director is the logonomc culture of schooling within which our roles are defined. The play we are rehearsing takes place within this larger drama of schooling while it reaffirms the reality underpinning that same drama.

In Eric’s case, the interactions are informed by some of the same meaning systems, but the drama we enact functions differently. Like Sandra, Eric tended to focus on the end product of assessment and view ‘good grades’ as a reward for completion of assignments. It seems that, for Eric, the interactions between us in terms classroom-based Assessment were completions of yet another assignment. These interactions are informed by the Eric’s community. This community is best represented by his mothers’ beliefs that the school ought to be involved building self-esteem, a concern that the existing preparation for proficiency testing is inadequate, and regret that she did not offer daily encouragement of her son’s reading. Eric’s emphasis in his own life of achievements in sports and his perception of himself as ‘not having time to read’ suggests that while school is important for him, the job is to ‘get good grades and get it done.’ My role as teacher director is even more pronounced in the portfolio conference I had with Eric. My agenda for portfolios informs my role as the teacher, especially as I want Eric to make connections between his literacy development in and out of school. Like Sandra, Eric’s role positions me as a fairly
traditional classroom teacher. In this role, I attempt to control the patterns of discourse in the conference. In the drama that takes place, I try to direct both the conference and the activities in the classroom. In this way, Eric and I perform a drama which focuses on maintaining traditional classroom power structures. Eric is both a participant in and audience for this drama, and this drama closes interpretive space within which Eric’s literacy development might have been more fully explored.

For Sam, the third case study, an emphasis on getting good grades takes precedence over most other activities in my classroom. His own experience with schooling suggests that, in middle school, his parents began to really push the need for good grades and see those grades as signs of success. As a participant in athletics, Sam is told again by coaches and administrators that grades are what matters. Ironically, Sam is not successful overall at earning high marks, and his throwing away work with low grades is a type of erasure of what he doesn’t like. I want the portfolio to steer Sam away from only focusing on grades toward looking more critically at his own literacy processes. The drama we perform in terms of assessment becomes a rehearsal of conflicting tensions existing between my views of direct assessment and Sam’s beliefs that, if he can get good grades, little else matters.

In a different way, Tammy is also very grade conscious, yet her emphasis on grades is part of a wider goal of attending a college on an athletic scholarship. She is aware of writing and reading as activities that have specific functions outside of a classroom. Tammy’s father supports her interest in sports and affirms the quality of education he believes she is receiving. Tammy has internalized the value of a
portfolio, and her interactions construct my role as a successful teacher in terms of portfolio-centered assessment practices. The drama we play out affirms our mutual satisfaction within defined perimeters of her portfolio. However, the drama lacks exploratory qualities, and our student-to-teacher interactions rehearse and affirm a success we have agreed on before we stage the portfolio conference.

Thread 2.

Within the drama of assessment, a portfolio functions as a site to deconstruct how multiple meaning systems are layered within the practices of assessment.

As a site to deconstruct meaning systems, Sandra’s portfolio provides space to probe a collision of meaning systems. My teacher-researcher agenda includes a vision of portfolios as sites for potential change, and it collides with my desire for control in the classroom as defined by the logonomic cultures of schooling. Further, my hopes for a portfolio-based assessment system collide with Sandra’s views of herself as a learner and her perceptions of assessment. Her portfolio functions as a site where Sandra reaffirms her views of assessment despite my hopes for change, and I acknowledge my own complicity in structuring interactions which undermine the goals I have for portfolios.

In the case of Eric, his portfolio becomes a site to inquire into the layers of power relationships in the classroom. My desire to control and direct two dramas simultaneously (the assessment drama enacted between Eric and me and another drama taking place in the classroom) reveals how I marshal discourse structures to maintain
traditional teacher-to-student relationships. Eric’s views of learning and assessment emphasizes product over process and my attempt to use a portfolio as a student-centered site for us to examine his literacy journey conflicts with my role of director. As I play the director, one function of the portfolio is as a site from which Eric becomes an observer of the drama of control. Thus, the portfolio functions as a site to reveal some interpretive dissonance between my agenda for the portfolio, my pedagogical practices, and Eric’s views and goals for assessment. By interpretive dissonance, I mean that the potential space which might have been opened for Eric’s self-reflection is closed off by the traditional configurations of power acted out in the classroom.

For Sam, the portfolio serves as a site to deconstruct how networks of meaning systems create a type of conformity to the logonomic culture of schooling. My agenda for a portfolio in this case includes a strong emphasis on self-reflection as an avenue to move Sam toward more careful revision of his texts. However, Sam’s view is that a portfolio’s function is a folder to archive his papers receiving ‘good grades.’ This focus on grades conforms to Sam’s parents’ concerns as well as the emphasis of the athletic programs in which he participates. Ironically, Sam’s conformity is problematic in that the ‘good grades’ he receives are few, due to his reluctance to reconsider and revise his work. The portfolio then is a site where ownership of assessment is contested. Though I want to construct a portfolio as a student-centered space for inquiry, Sam perceives this portfolio (like other grading practices) as another teacher-
centered assessment practice. His views conform to the orientation of a traditional culture of school and other communities he inhabits.

For Tammy, the portfolio functions as a site to deconstruct affirmation. In our interactions, I affirm Tammy’s portfolio experience as positive, and overall I believe it is. However, Tammy’s portfolio provides a site to reflect on the processes and meaning systems at work in the construction of a ‘positive portfolio experience.’ The purpose is not to be overly critical but to reflect on other possible choices and directions our interactions might have taken. Tammy’s comments about liking to keep her portfolio as evidence for her own development as well as to showcase her work for her mother resonate with my own views and goals for and views of portfolios. Additionally, Tammy’s own participation in track and basketball were affirming for her, and she is use to praise and success for her work. I consider her a ‘successful student’ in my class, and the portfolio becomes a site where I am anxious to document that success. Our drama stops at documentation of her success rather than a critical exploration as to how she might build on her accomplishments to reach toward other goals. In this case, examining Tammy’s portfolio as a site shows how working to effectively with learner-based assessment may necessitate ongoing critical reflections on interactions with students, even if that student has seemingly achieved the agenda which I as a teacher-researcher articulate.
Thread 3.

Differences in the language and discourse structures in negotiations involving portfolios are related to gender, and these differences shape the evaluation of a portfolio in specific ways.

In one of his early works on language, Halliday (1973) defined language as meaning potential, i.e., "sets of options, or alternatives, in meaning, that are available to the speaker-hearer" (p. 72). To more fully delineate this thread, it is necessary to look closely at the question patterns for male as opposed to female students. While I did not ask each student in these cases the exact same questions, patterns of questioning strategies exist. Adopting Halliday's perspective on language allowed me to consider how particular patterns of questions in the portfolio conference open or close interpretive options available to students and how those options vary with gender.

Each conference begins in one of two ways. With Sam and Tammy, I ask them to tell me about their portfolios; on the other hand, with Sandra and Eric, I begin by focusing on specific work in their portfolios. However, it is after this opening that my questioning strategies begin to align with gender and shape the direction and interpretive options of the students. In the cases of Sandra and Tammy, I ask about learner strengths and goals respectively. These questions are 'what' questions and call for evaluative responses almost immediately in the conference. Once I've urged Sandra and Tammy to 'identify what their strengths and goals are,' I ask them to consider their portfolio as a whole (object) and whether they liked it. This strategy of questioning constructs a portfolio as a product and closes off options to explore the
process work behind the portfolio itself. Clearly suggested here is my assumption that the female students have been successful, therefore I am interested in assessing outcomes. Also, my own male discourse language style leads me to emphasize outcomes over exploring relationships among meaning systems. This style is characterized by a decided focus on product-oriented language.

In the cases of Sam and Eric, I focus on improving reading and writing and working on something personal respectively. These are more ‘how’ questions (i.e., ‘how will you improve, how will you work on personal literacy’) and are more process-oriented. Next, when Sam offers ‘handwriting’ as a feature of his writing process which he would like to improve, I ask him to reexamine his portfolio to try to get him to talk about something else on a deeper level. With Eric, acknowledge the difficulty of thinking about personal literacy as a way to encourage a more expanded response. Clearly suggested here is how my questioning strategies with the male students direct the conferences toward a more process, exploratory approach.

Even if Sandra and Tammy engaged more fully with portfolio-based assessment than Eric and Sam, the questioning strategies I adopted with the female student closed up space for full self-reflection on the nature of that engagement. My choices did not promote the full potential, options, or alternatives Halliday (1973) described. It is important to look carefully at how we, as classroom teachers, interact with male and female students in terms of assessment. Differences in questioning strategies and language structures impact not only the direction of assessment but how we provide or take away spaces for students to explore their own achievements.
Thread 4.

Resistance emerges as a construct for both students and teachers in a drama of assessment and indicates the complexity of classroom-based assessment.

For Sandra, resistance takes the form of remaining in a traditional student-to-teacher role in which she keeps her sense of herself as a reader out of school separate from ‘doing literature’ in school. She resists my attempts to bridge these two spaces with a portfolio in a classroom-based assessment system. Her resistance is bound up with her awareness and experiences in the culture of schooling. She knows that reading involves choosing her own books and deriving pleasure from that experience; however, literature class has meant reading teacher selected books and trying to read them, all the while guessing what that teacher wanted her to get from the text. My resistance with Sandra is my own constructed teacher in control role in which resists creating space for Sandra to own her portfolio so that more direct, learner-based assessment is realized. In both instances, these forms of resistance become constructs which shape the drama of the portfolio conference toward a product rather than allow for a process to emerge.

In the case of Eric, resistance also plays out in his sense of portfolios as merely a place to archive his finished, high-graded assignments. He resists my agenda of the portfolio as a window to look into and out of relationships among his personal and school literacy. Eric remains well-defended despite my attempts to direct his portfolio conference toward this metaphoric window of literacy. The issue for him is still
eligibility for sports, and he sees assessment as a means to that end as long as he receives high marks. With Eric, my resistance centers around classroom control. My resistance to allowing other students space within the discourse of the classroom turns into a play within a play which I perform for Eric as the traditional classroom teacher. My construct of resistance in this case subverts portfolio assessment goals and creates dissonance between my claims for negotiated, learner-based assessments and my reluctance to give up discourse space for students. Resistance again emerges from interactions among students and my role as the teacher to direct assessment in ways that dramatize particular assessment practices.

Sam's case demonstrates how a student assuming an ineffective role and functioning as a 'poor actor' constructs resistance which prevents him from moving beyond the assessment systems in which he historically has not had much success. His admitted goal of good grades would have been realized more effectively had he viewed his portfolio as a place to do process work and develop his abilities. However, he resists ownership of his portfolio and constructs it as a teacher-driven enterprise. My resistance is realized as frustration with Sam's attitude toward what I believe is a more direct, learner-based form of assessment. My frustration exists dialogically with Sam's resistance and prevents me from acting as a more able negotiator within the drama of assessment. My resistance anchors me in the role of director, maintaining traditional configurations of powering the classroom.

With Tammy, resistance is the most problematic. She plays it safe within a situation of acknowledged success. There is a lack of resistance on her part because I
was satisfied with her achievement of the goals I desired in a classroom-based assessment system. However, my resistance casts me into an interpretive space where my practices reveal a predetermined view of the worth of the portfolio. I limit my own and Tammy’s exploration of literacy with her by resisting inquiry into her process and notion of her portfolio. This subtle complexity is central to understanding power dynamics and how teacher scripts close opportunities to accentuate student voices. My resistance positions her in a passive role in the dramatic rehearsal of portfolio assessment practices. In this way, I resist pushing her portfolio experience to inquire critically into her own literacy growth. Taken with the apparent success of the portfolio for Tammy, I resist looking very hard into the nature of or interactions connected to her portfolio.

I might have encouraged Tammy’s voice much more than I did. For example, in the conference when she volunteers that she shares her portfolio with her mother, I could have opened up interpretive space by asking her how she came to do that and how her mother reacted. Instead, I comment “that’s great” and quickly bring the conference to a close. As a teacher, my resistance keeps me playing it safe rather than engage in more process-oriented work which may have given Tammy opportunities to develop her voice in the process of discussing her portfolio.

It is interesting that Sandra, Eric, and Sam resist working with portfolio-based assessment, and I practice more successful teaching with them by pushing each student to self-reflect on their portfolio. With Tammy, I am satisfied, so I resist pushing her towards self-reflection of her portfolio. This should be read as a type of cautionary tale
regarding classroom-based assessment. We must interrogate our apparent successes with students with the same critical awareness as we do our more problematic teacher-student relationships.

Summary

The dramatic threads emerging from this case study are significant for understanding the complexities of classroom based assessment as a dramatic interaction involving negotiations among multiple meaning systems. Out of this interaction, a culture of assessment is created. This culture is dynamic and is interpenetrated by the worlds of students, parents, teachers, and the culture of schooling. Further questions arise as teacher-researchers examine how those cultures are created, how they change over time, how role shifts by stakeholders within the drama impact assessment, and how different roles might be articulated across content areas.

Also, teacher-research in classroom-based assessment needs to be reconceptualized to address this type of inquiry as a postmodern, multivocal, enterprise involving an awareness of the intertextual, dramatic nature of meaning making. In the final chapter of this study, I will describe this reconceptualization and explore issues raised by this shift in research theory and practice.
CHAPTER 6
DEVELOPING NEW VIEWS FOR EXAMINING CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT

Introduction

In this final chapter, I want to argue for new views for examining classroom-based assessment centered around two overarching concepts: (a) the value of looking at portfolio-based assessment as complex, and (b) the value of a teacher research lens for studying classrooms' assessment as sociocultural practices. Using each concept as a point of departure, I describe the value and problems for researchers looking at assessment from multiple perspectives. Next, I speculate how the five frames relate to one another in terms of configurations of self, community, culture, and society. Then, I reflect on the nature of my own study and consider how its nonlinear process is both its strength and its limitation. To do this, the following three figures present the development of my attempts to represent my analysis of the data. This will show how my perceptions shifted over the course of the study as I began to come to terms with the layers of the classroom and the layers of the case studies. Finally, I suggest directions for future research looking at cultures of assessment.
Figure 6
Recursive Circularity - Version #1

Social Drama Frame

Critical Discourse Frame

Semiotic Frame

Teacher Research Frame

Data

Teacher Research

Cultural Resistance Frame

Themes

Themes

Critical Resistance Culture of Resistance

Semiotic Social Drama

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Figure 7
Recursive Circularity - Version #2
Complicating Classroom Assessment

A theme that reverberates through this study is the complexity of portfolio-based assessment. This complexity hinges on relationships among multiple meaning systems, issues of power dynamics, constructs of resistance, and shifting relationships among learners as portfolios become sites for contesting/negotiating assessment. As I have argued in the previous chapter, multiple meaning systems converge as a stakeholders negotiate assessment in the context of portfolios. Ogbu’s (1988) notion of ‘cultural ecology’ was useful to help conceptualize how this convergence is realized. Ogbu explained that cultural ecology:
enables us to study the connections between the school or learning processes and societal forces (such as economic patterns and opportunities, intergroup relations, and status mobility in a given society) which affect school curricula, classroom attitudes and efforts, and various activities of school personnel and other members of the educational system. (p. 234)

For assessment research, Ogbu’s (1988) definition of cultural ecology resonated with the definition of culture which I developed in Chapter 1 because both view learning and assessment as social activities and because both extend the boundaries of classrooms beyond school walls. Further, these activities are influenced by societal forces” which inform decisions individuals make in regards to assessment. Ogbu’s concept of “ecology” premises assessment as a dynamic, fragile system which interrelates worlds in and out of schools. For researchers wishing to study a culture of assessment, separating these two is problematic because learners bring their worlds into classrooms. If school systems and teachers ignore or refuse to consider how personal and public systems of meaning come into play as they attempt to assess student’s literacy development, the richness of student learning is sacrificed. This is the reason that standardized testing can only offer a limited view of what learners can actually do. It attempts to disengage assessment and social identity. Portfolio-based assessment, as I have characterized it, assumes learner identities are socially constructed and therefore a key part of the assessment process.

Further, factored into this process are dynamics of power, race, gender, and learner resistance to agendas set by teachers who are subject to the institutions of schooling. Rather than view these as distractions to or unimportant to assessing
learners, I see them as bound up with assessment in complex ways. Therefore, as we move toward richer characterizations, more complete portraits of student learning, teachers should question how students' literacy is related to social identity and begin to inquire how this identity is a result of complex social forces. A way to undertake this type of work is to view teacher research as an ongoing part of exploring what classroom cultures are about.

This type of exploratory study may force researchers to shift their expectations from cut and dry understandings of assessment to more textured and less neat explanations. Such changes may not be easy due to the historic emphasis the institutions of schooling have placed on products and definable outcomes that can be generalized across schools and students. However, as researchers, we must come to terms with the problems that learners who are not part of the dominant culture continue to have in schools. New ways of looking at classrooms may provide better understandings of how to design assessments which are more equitable for all students.

Valuing of a Teacher-Research Lens for Studying Classroom-based Assessment

Teacher research has the potential for providing new understandings of assessment as dramatic, negotiated, and evolving enterprise in which traditional dichotomies of researcher and researched blur. This blurring moves teacher research toward a post-positivist view of classroom culture and provides a way for teachers as researchers to see students as collaborators in the complicated process of assessment.
However, this does not mean that issues of power, resistance, and other concerns cease to be problematic. Rather, they become part of the data in the sense that teacher researchers, together with students, fold these issues into the process of examining assessment.

Also, the post-positivist teacher-researcher has the opportunity to deconstruct their own roles in social dramas of the classroom because the issue of objectivity is never broached. Teacher-researchers not only do not presume to be objective about students, they do not desire it. Instead, embracing the subjectivity of the teacher-researcher lens will provide a way to look at multiple roles of stakeholders from multiple frames. In this way, teacher research does not compete with more traditional forms of inquiry: rather, it provides alternative ways to view the social interactions which characterize ‘classrooms.’ Researching and developing these alternatives requires multiple frames to see how the complexities of classroom-based assessment are realized.

**Connecting Frames**

In Chapter 2, I developed five frames through which to view the context of the classroom and construct case studies of four students. The semiotic, social drama, critical discourse, culture, and resistance, and teacher-research frames are overlapping lenses that focus and telescope the assessment practices of a classroom. Portfolios are at the center of my assessment practice in this study. A semiotic frame focused my attention on the interrelation of various texts and telescoped my view so that I could
step back and see how meaning systems both in and out of school shaped learners’ perceptions of assessment as they developed portfolios in the class.

Overlaid on a semiotic frame, a social drama frame focused my gaze on the dramas of assessment and telescoped my attention on roles stakeholders assumed in these dramas. This helped me see how student-to-teacher interactions could be scripted and counterscripted to widen or narrow interpretive space in portfolio-based assessment. A critical discourse frame complemented the social drama frame because it clarified my ability to see how discursive practices of schooling shaped my assessment decisions as a classroom teacher. It also telescoped my sense of how students contested and negotiated with these practices as they sought their own voices within portfolio work. A culture and resistance frame shifted the angle and allowed me to view ways students resisted my agenda of using portfolios as a vehicle for assessment and telescoped my awareness of my own resistance to fully exploring the problematic nature of ‘successes’ in using portfolios. And finally, a teacher-researcher frame focused my understanding of how lines between teacher and researcher blur and are erased as I instructed learners on and inquired into the nature of portfolio assessment. This erasure telescoped my conception of teacher research or researcher teaching within a post-positivist light.

Together, these frames enabled me to see processes of working with portfolios as multidimensional and textured within a culture of classroom assessment. It might be argued that each frame alone would provide a complex portrait of classroom assessment. However, if they were employed as overlapping lenses, the goal of this
research on assessment ceases to be 'getting it right' and shifts instead to exploring possibilities to better represent ways sociocultural forces play into the increasing diversity of the students we teach. Also, as I argued in Chapter 3, it moves away from perceiving teacher-research as linear and views it as more reflexive and circular. In this next section, I deconstruct part of my own research journey, analyzing data as a way to represent this type of process.

Unpacking RecursiveCircularity

In Figure 5, I have placed the data at the center of a single circle with the themes emerging from it and becoming frames. The lines represent a 'thickening,' by which I mean that I turned them back on the data as a way to show how I analyze that data. What is problematic, though, is the frames are outside of the circle, and I am not able to capture the interactions of the layers of the classroom and the layers of the case studies.

In Figure 6, I have worked through one of the problems. I have moved the frames within the circle of data, which suggest a tighter relationship between emerging themes and the developing frames. At this point, I had realized I needed to represent the recursiveness of analysis more carefully, but I still was lumping all the data together and not really showing how transactions were taking place between the context of the classroom data (audiotapes and research journal notes) and the case study data (interviews, portfolios, parent surveys, videotapes).
In Figure 7, I split the circle horizontally, and I am closer to capturing the mutually informative relationships between the layers of the study. Further, the figure has become more specified in that data sources are now named, and the sense of how themes emerged from specific evidence is clearer. I have moved closer to representing the ‘circularity’ I am striving for and the complexity of the relationships among data, themes, and frames are portrayed in a better fashion. However, I realized that what I was missing was a way of depicting the transactions taking place between the worlds of school and the worlds outside of school. What I needed was a way to show how the world of the students outside of school and the world inside the school were interrelated.

The resulting conception, represented in Figure 1 presented earlier, retains much of the previous relationships among data, themes, and frames, and adds a different geometrical figure (a triangle) to attempt to capture how students’ worlds/communities outside of school interconnect with the world inside of school. This figure shows more completely the complex relationships that came to the fore as I worked through interrelationships within the study. Important here is how my own process of coming to terms with the data of the study kept circling back into itself as I strove to understand how pieces of evidence might be constructed and reconstructed to represent the whole of what I was seeing. This process is not linear, but I might have just used the final figure and submerged the process through which it changed. However, often what is missing from reporting research is an account of how what we do as researchers evolves and shifts through various stages of awareness and
understanding. As teacher researchers move to doing more post-positivist work, including the different scenes of study and how those scenes had to be revised as the drama of research unfolded is valuable. In this way, we would be able to portray more richly how researchers struggle to revise meaning in the same ways that they seek to show subjects of the research doing as well. This might begin to collapse hierarchies of those who know and those who do not know and move us toward a more collaborative space to study classroom cultures.

**Projecting Research Futures for Studying Classroom Assessment**

In thinking about the future of studying classroom-based assessment, there are two shifts I believe that need to be made. The first is how we view assessment, and the second is the roles in which we perceive teachers. As I have argued in earlier chapters, assessment is a social practice that cannot be separated from the social identity of those being assessed. Yet, traditionally schools and teachers have focused evaluation of students on knowledge of content, in effect ignoring the personal dynamics of knowing.

Some attempts have been made to move toward a more process-oriented approach by using portfolios in order to view learners’ progress over time and assess what students are actually doing. But this is not enough. Simply introducing portfolios into a classroom as another type of assessment is naive, and as I have shown in the case studies of students, resistance, concerns about grades, and what teachers do with assessment data remain as issues for students despite teachers intentions. Returning to
Ogbu’s (1988) notion of ‘cultural ecology,’ portfolios have the potential to become sites within a culture of assessment from which to negotiate different practices of assessment and re-inform the ‘ecology’ of relationships among stakeholders. However, to make this shift, classroom teachers must use portfolios as a way to interrogate how sociocultural (including political) issues of race, gender, and power are intricately woven into the nature of student learning. There are risks. It may be that we will become uncomfortable with how we measure literacy growth along the lines of race and gender. We may find out that the fairness we hoped to achieve in traditional assessment is, in reality, an illusion, masked under the banner of objectivity. We may discover that we have silenced learner’s voices by not allowing for processes for appealing our judgments and evaluations of student achievement, and that we have based those judgments of deficit models of learning. Yet, I believe these are risks and issues which we need to embrace to develop more sensitive, fair, learner-based assessments in classrooms.

Second, we need to shift the ways we portray teachers from dispensers of information, purveyors of content knowledge, and gate keepers on student achievement to individuals who have real, human relationships with students. Possibly, work in other fields can help education make this shift. For example, postmodernist family therapist White (1990) described how a Foucauldian orientation toward his use of narrative helps him encourage his clients to deconstruct practices which have oppressed them and restory their lives in ways that open possibilities.
I am not arguing that teachers can solve all student problems or that teachers should become their students’ therapist. I am claiming that perceiving students as our clients should be a role for teachers, and our goals should include advocacy, growth, and helping students find languages to give voice to their lives and restory their worlds, opening possibilities for human interaction.

One way to think about this interaction and expand the notion of roles is through the use of process drama. This approach (discussed in Chapter 2) is a way to use drama as a lens to shift authority away from the teacher/director and engage all stakeholders in collaborative explorations of meaning. Further, using drama in this fashion connects directly with drama of assessment as I have characterized them in this study. Process drama provides a way for learners to reflect on and create new understandings of assessment through voicing their own learning possibilities. This would mean that our relationships with students would become increasingly complex and call for teachers who are researchers with students, desiring to explore, from multiple frames, the multi-dimensional space of learning.

Exiting the Study

Finally, I have, through analyzing the context of the classroom, characterized classroom assessment, in which portfolios are sites of meaning making, as a culture, involving complicated endeavors and processes. I have focused on these endeavors and processes from multiple frames to show how a single view of the social nature of
assessment practices is reductionist and does not allow for an understanding of how competing meaning systems inform them.

However, there are limitations to this study. Although I involved students in some analysis of the data, this was late in the research process. It would have been interesting to seek their collaboration in aspects of design and ongoing analysis of the data that was primarily about them. I might have sought similar input from their parents or caregivers whose words and responses I wove into the case studies.

Despite these limitations, I collaborated with students in ways that showed how “reflective space” can be created within dramas of assessment. Reflective space is a space within the discourse structures of student-teacher interactions that allow stakeholders a safe rhetorical, interpretive site to develop their own diverse voices and identities and have those voices honored within a classroom culture. This space is collaborative as it is co-created from processes of negotiation and contestation, as learners seek to find ways to represent their language and literacy growth.

In the present study, this reflective space is tied to the dramatic nature of the portfolio conferences and ways of asking questions that encouraged speculation and self-evaluation rather than rehearsing already-agreed-upon outcomes. Examples of such questioning strategies have been developed by therapists who encourage their clients to collaboratively explore problems and potential solutions through constructing self-empowered narratives, thus creating positive futures (Furman & Ahola, 1994). These strategies are useful for classroom-based assessment because teacher-researchers can learn to pursue more open-ended questions with students. Rather than focus solely
on products and outcomes, such questions help teachers work with learners to gain an increased awareness of both stakeholders' processes of evaluation.

An example of this approach is a line of questioning which (a) encourages learners to rename their "problems" and view them as strengths or transitional strategies, (b) identifies inherent strengths they already possess, (c) recognizes achievements, and (d) imagines how they might begin to construct what researchers call their "social futures" (New London Group, 1996). These "social futures" include an increased awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity as well as new understandings of how multiple texts function in an expanding "communication environment" (New London Group, 1996, p. 61). Asking questions that facilitate creating reflective space where these issues are explored is important. Portfolio work provides an opportunity for such strategies because student-teacher conferences are a component of the process.

For example, I might ask a student in the context of an assessment conference, "What do you believe is your biggest problem as a writer? Could you give it a nickname so that you can recognize it?" Once this "problem" is renamed, students can shift and view their former problem as a strategy they have power over rather than seeing it as a limitation. Another example of this approach is to ask, "Can you think of instances when teachers or other adults have underestimated your abilities? What did they miss?" This allows students space to describe a positive learning strength they possess. Once a student has articulated a strength, a teacher-researcher interested in classroom assessment could begin to look for evidence of this strength with the student.
Another example might be to say, “If you were sitting here as the teacher, what question(s) would you want to asking yourself as a student?” More than a role reversal, this type of question engages students in focusing on their achievements and sense of growth and development. Further, this line of questioning opens reflective space for a student to process their feelings and thoughts about assessment. As they process and reflect on their development, they narrate those experiences within the larger text of their own literacy. Such discourse increases collaborative work as both student and teacher become learners, seeking fuller understandings of an individual's growth. Finally, I might say, “Let us imagine that this class is over and you decide that it has really helped you. What questions do you think will have been answered for you?” This type of question will help students imagine “social futures” (New London Group, 1996) for themselves in which they name their own successes and pose new questions and goals for their own learning and even see how these goals are connected to their social identities.

In my study, I was most successful in co-creating this reflective space with Sam, in some ways the most resistant student. With Tammy, who liked the portfolio work the most, I assumed her success was intact and didn’t ask the kind of questions that pushed her beyond her own and my satisfaction with her portfolio to speculate and reflect. This suggests that resistance as I have characterized it in this study assumes a different place in classroom interactions in general and assessment in particular. Traditionally, resistance is viewed in an educational context as something that closes down communication or works against successful teaching and evaluating of student
learning. However, resistance emerges from my study as a feature of a culture of assessment that goes beyond "procedural display" (Bloome, Puro, & Theodorou, 1989) and becomes a nexus for understanding how various meaning systems interrelate in the classroom. Perceived in this way, looking carefully as resistance will help learners reconceptualize it as a way to perform changes.

Critical theorist Hooks (1994) described her sense of performance change in terms of teaching in diverse classrooms:

To teach in varied communities, not only our paradigms must shift but also the way we think, write, speak. The engaged voice must never be fixed and absolute but always changing, always evolving in dialogue with a world beyond itself. (p. 11)

Hooks' construct of the "engaged voice" resonated with my findings about resistance in that viewing resistance as a way to help learners find their own voice and engage in evolving dialogues about their learning processes reconceptualizes it within a positive frame. Also, teacher-researchers could analyze their own resistance as a way to push their pedagogies toward a more inclusive, learner-centered approach to their work and reinforce that work with questions about how resistance is linked with diversity.

This indicates that recognizing and renaming roles of resistance through asking different kinds of questions can shift our understanding of resistance from a negative to a generative, collaborative feature of classroom-based assessment. Such a shift is critical for helping learners create reflective space to negotiate the complexities of assessment and for researchers to gain a better understanding of these complexities.
These complexities are dramatized among the shifting, multilayered socially-dynamic practices that make up classrooms, and understanding how these practices constitute and in turn are constituted by a culture of assessment is a question that future research needs to address. As we begin to see more clearly how social identity is a complex array of meaning systems and how those meaning systems collide with educational systems, we will be able to envision and design new systems of assessment that better capture the literacies which students possess. From these new assessment systems, classrooms can become environments where assessment practices are more collaborative, ongoing, embedded in what learners actually do, and are a catalyst for dialogue. This dialogue has the potential to engage learners in a process of creating a community in which they make education “the practice of freedom” (Hooks, 1994, p. 15). This freedom would transform classrooms into spaces in which the diverse, multilayered nature of literacy and learning could be integrated into dynamic interactions within teaching and learning. These interactions could empower learners to celebrate their own individualistic voices as they co-create a rich culture of learning.
REFERENCES


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