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NEGOTIATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LITERACY TEACHING AND LEARNING ACROSS CONTEXTS AND OVER TIME IN A FIRST GRADE CLASSROOM

DISSERTATION

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

By

Maria Luiza Dantas, B.A., M.A.

*****

The Ohio State University
1999

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Rebecca Kantor, co-Adviser
Professor Becky W. Kirschner, co-Adviser
Professor David E. Fernie
Professor Carol A. Lyons

Approved by

Professor Rebecca Kantor, co-Adviser
Professor Becky W. Kirschner, co-Adviser
Professor David E. Fernie
Professor Carol A. Lyons

Approved by

Rebecca Kantor
co-Adviser

Becky Kirschner
co-Adviser

College of Education
ABSTRACT

This is a yearlong ethnographic study examining the nature of literacy learning and teaching in a first grade classroom, and involving a collaborative relationship between a researcher and a classroom teacher. This study builds on the premises of a sociocultural perspective by taking a comprehensive look across contexts, situating opportunities for literacy learning and teaching in the classroom context as co-constructed and from the perspectives of classroom members, and in layers of context outside the classroom, including the school, district (and state standards), and family and community.

It further builds on a “situated perspective” on the nature of classroom life and literacy practices by tracing major aspects of life in a first grade classroom across contexts and over time. Four “tracer units” are used as analytical tools and interpretive elements: (1) assessment practices; (2) a piece of the classroom’s literacy curriculum called “songs and poems;” (3) a planned literacy event over time called “shared reading;” and (4) the story of the literacy learning of one student named Derek. As “snap shots” taken in the flow of classroom life, these tracer units illuminate the nature of the tracers themselves and the system or stream of classroom life in which they are embedded. They display three consistent themes: (a) the multi-layered nature of contexts in which literacy learning and teaching is embedded and situated; (b) the interdependence of layers of context; and (c) the negotiated, co-constructed and situated nature of classroom literacy learning and
teaching. This study shows the impact that multiple layers of context have on classroom literacy practices over time, and demonstrates how the co-constructed and situated nature of literacy teaching and learning influence teacher decision making, classroom literacy practices and curriculum, and student learning. Thus, it shows that to understand the nature of literacy learning and teaching it is necessary to examine it as situated and constituted across contexts and over time.

This study illuminates and provides insights into the central role and power of teachers as decision makers in the process of curriculum development. It reveals that artful teaching involves orchestrating the flow of classroom life by taking into account and negotiating possibilities, conflicting expectations and the varied elements that make up daily school and classroom life. Similarly, this study shows that both literacy teaching and learning processes involve active decision making and negotiation of possibilities, expectations and images of a reader and writer, and situated constraints and tensions.
In Memory of my Father:

Ney Dantas
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VITA

March 12, 1965
Born - Aracaju, SE, Brazil

1985
Teaching Assistant, Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas, Sao Paulo, Brazil

1986
B.A., Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas, Sao Paulo, Brazil

1986-1991
Speech Language Pathologist, Public Schools and Private Practice, Brasilia, Brazil

1991-1992
Speech Language Pathologist, Columbus International Program, Ohio

1992-1993
Research Assistant, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1993-1995
Teaching Assistant, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1995
M.A., The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1995-1998
Research Assistant, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

PUBLICATIONS


FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Education

Studies in Early Literacy, Theoretical Perspectives on Learning, Development and Teaching, and Sociocultural and Political Dimensions of Schooling Processes.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Early literacy learning and teaching is an area that has been extensively studied and discussed. A large body of research and instructional programs has contributed to different understandings of its nature and processes (among others the work of Bloome, 1987; Clay, 1991, 1993a; Cochran-Smith, 1984; Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Dyson, 1993, 1995; Ferreiro, 1990; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Heath, 1983; Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992; Taylor, 1983; Teale & Suzby, 1986; Solsken, 1993). Over the past few decades, different definitions of “what is” literacy and early literacy learning have been constructed influenced by theoretical and practical understandings of the nature of learning, teaching, schooling and literacy practices within the fields of education, linguistics, psychology, anthropology and/or sociology.

Recently, in the United States, different theoretical and political stances have provoked ongoing public debate and controversy over appropriate and effective early literacy education programs (e.g., “back-to-basics” campaign). This discourse has been fueled by current national concern that students are leaving school with low literacy skills, and unprepared to adapt to the new working conditions and relations, which enable American business and industry to better compete in the international market (Shannon,
With the release of A Nation at Risk (1983) by the U.S. Department of Education, school reform has become a national and state-level focus. The starting point of the current education reform movement was a push for national and state-level standards (Ravitch, 1996) in all academic areas including English/language arts. The push for national standards, reinforced by the America 2000 plan, appeals for many because of its focus on excellence, reaching national education goals, and accountability measurements (i.e., state-level standardized assessments).

Controversy on how best to teach early reading and writing has provoked a campaign for "back to basics" teaching, an argument for direct phonics-based reading instruction (Routman, 1996). The other side in this debate argues for a view of early literacy education and classroom literacy practices based upon child-centered, literature-based and integrated approaches to learning, authentic and meaningful opportunities for literacy learning and teaching, and teaching phonics in the context of whole and predictable texts. This view has been influenced by an "emergent literacy" perspective developed over the past three decades, and largely influenced by cognitive approaches to learning and development and research interest in children's literacy development before formal instruction (Teale & Suzby, 1986). In addition, recent studies on the nature of literacy learning and teaching argue for a "situated approach", a more responsive strategy which considers children's differences as a resource in classroom learning by making possible multiple ways of participation (Dyson, 1997) as well as assessing children through multiple lenses (Taylor, 1993).
The national standards-based reform movement, the back-to-basics campaign, new perspectives on curriculum approaches to literacy learning and classroom practices, are all trends that influence what becomes constituted as literacy learning and teaching in present classrooms. In other words, to understand the nature of classroom literacy learning and teaching, as well as examine appropriate and effective instructional practices, it is important not only to take into account the nature of a particular curriculum and classroom context (i.e., the teacher, students, evolving classroom community, and space, time and materials available) but also the social, political and historical contexts in which they are embedded. For instance, the push for national standards and development of state-level standards and assessments shape and constrains “what counts” as literacy learning and teaching in the primary grades. At the same time, public debate and controversy over appropriate ways of teaching reading and writing influence families’ perspectives on literacy learning and teaching, and expectations of school practices. Finally, teachers have to negotiate these constraints and agendas in order to accommodate their own perspectives and their students’ backgrounds in the ongoing process of curriculum enactment. Thus, literacy learning and teaching becomes constituted as a sociocultural and political process, which shape the literacy practices and opportunities for learning and teaching available in the classroom.

In essence, understanding literacy learning and teaching processes requires an understanding of the complex ways in which children construct and use literacies and learning environments in their everyday lives, as well as, understanding the complex ways that teachers and children negotiate and make sense in their ongoing process of
curriculum co-construction. Children bring learning patterns to the classroom's literacy experiences that are a starting point for their classroom learning. Teacher's decision-making process is complex and negotiates multiple agendas (many times contradicting agendas); thus, what gets co-constructed at the classroom level involves negotiation and is influenced by multiple layers of context.

**Conceptualizing Literacy Learning and Teaching**

Emergent literacy and sociocultural perspectives on the nature of literacy learning and teaching frame this study. Informed by an emergent literacy perspective (Clay, 1991; Crawford, 1995; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Teale & Suzby, 1986), I view literacy learning and teaching as (1) an ongoing process that begins long before formal schooling begins for children; (2) best promoted within a literacy-rich environment; and, (3) supported by children's active engagement in meaningful reading and writing experiences.

Guided by a sociocultural perspective, I view the nature of classroom life, and literacy learning and/or teaching processes as socially and culturally situated and constituted (Chandler, 1992, Cochran-Smith, 1984; Collins & Green, 1992; Dyson, 1993; Heath, 1983; Solsken, 1993; Weade, 1992). Thus, literacy teaching and learning processes are understood as "situationally defined in the ways in which teachers and students construct patterns of classroom life" (Collins & Green, p.60). Further, the nature of classroom life, as well as, opportunities for literacy learning and teaching are
understood as “embedded within a complex and dynamically evolving social context that is co-constructed by students and teacher” (Weade, p.95).

In addition, a dialogic view of the nature of literacy learning and teaching processes as embedded in multiple layers of interdependent and interrelated contexts (Rogoff, 1995) is central to the theoretical framework guiding this study. In other words, a classroom literacy event or practice is facilitated and embedded within other classroom activities, school practices, and children's home and community's beliefs associated with literacy (Cochran-Smith, 1984). At the same time, social and ideological agendas, and policy decisions made at various levels of government and school administration form another layer of context that affects the ways in which classroom literacy practices or events are defined (Bloome, 1987; Bloome & Green, 1992).

In this study, the concept of “intertextuality” (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Lemke, 1995) is also used to interpret the influence of multiple contexts in the nature of co-constructed literacy practices. Classroom literacy events or practices are “viewed as texts that are written by teacher and students in and through their actions and interactions (oral as well as written) (Green & Meyer, 1991; Weade & Green, 1989)” (Collins & Green, 1992, p.69). In this sense, a text (or context) is not “complete or autonomous in itself: it needs to be read, and it is read, in relation to other texts” (Lemke, 1995, p.41). Classroom literacy practices represent the negotiation and juxtaposition of different texts, and mark the presence of intertextual links not only across time and activity locally situated in the classroom, but also between classroom events and broader contexts (e.g.,
the teacher’s and students’ home/community experiences, and the school’s and district’s history and expectations).

**Statement of the Problem**

A large body of literature has discussed and researched early literacy. However, much of the theoretical assumptions guiding major perspectives, such as “readiness” and “emergent literacy” perspectives (Teale & Sulzby, 1986), have overlooked and placed limits on important dimensions of the nature of literacy learning and teaching. In particular, how the nature of literacy learning and teaching can be described and examined in relationship to the flow of classroom and school life. Recent studies grounded in a sociocultural perspective have provided new theoretical and methodological lenses to examine literacy learning and/or teaching processes, and the nature of classroom life (e.g., Chandler, 1992, Cochran-Smith, 1984; Collins & Green, 1992; Dyson, 1993; Heath, 1983; Solsken, 1993; Weade, 1992). Nevertheless, the interplay between learning and teaching processes over time and across contexts, and the nature of curriculum co-construction need to be further explored. The “tensions created for students, teachers, and others who somehow manage to juggle the inherent contradictions in conflicting ideologies of classroom practice remain relatively unexplored” (Weade, 1992, p.90). More comprehensive insights on the nature and interplay of literacy learning and teaching processes can help teachers and other educators understand the process of curriculum enactment. Rather than taking a static view of curriculum and literacy practices, it is important to develop dynamic ways of seeing and
understanding what is involved in what constitutes literacy learning and teaching over one school year. The aim of this study is to add to these initiatives, particularly by examining over time and across contexts the nature of curriculum co-construction, ongoing teaching decision-making, and classroom opportunities for literacy learning and teaching.

**Purpose of the Study and Questions**

The purpose of this study is to understand the nature of literacy learning and teaching in a first grade classroom. Further, its aim is to examine the interplay of literacy learning and teaching processes, and the nature of curriculum co-construction as situated within multiple layers of context (i.e., classroom, school, district and state, and community and family). Its focus is on how classroom members (the teacher and students) constructed opportunities for literacy learning and teaching in a first grade classroom over the school year.

The following overarching question guided the choice of methodology and served as preliminary frame for the data collection and analysis processes.

**Overarching Question:** *What is the nature of literacy learning and teaching in a particular first grade classroom?*

To address this question, specific sub-questions were also explored as guiding frames:

1. What are the opportunities for literacy learning in this classroom? How are literacy practices defined across events and over time?

2. How are the opportunities for literacy learning shaped and co-constructed by the students and teacher (as well as by other contexts)?
3. How do students engage in and construct opportunities for literacy learning (at the individual and collective level)?

4. What is the interplay between the students’ and teacher’s understandings of literacy learning and teaching?

Considering the recursive and theory-building nature of ethnographic research, new questions also emerged from and during the research process. As these questions were addressed, they influenced the data collection and analysis processes.

Methodological Choices

The primary purpose of this study was to understand the nature of literacy learning and teaching. It adopted an interpretive approach and ethnographic perspective because these methodologies allow examining and understanding the meanings of actions and thought from the perspective of, and as constructed by, classroom members. The choice of an interpretive approach relates to its focus of inquiry on the meaning of human action in cultural context and social life (Erickson, 1986; Gaskin, Miller & Corsaro, 1992). To make visible the nature of literacy learning and teaching processes, within and across different contexts overtime, as constructed by and from the perspectives of classroom members (teacher and students), this study adopted an ethnographic perspective (Green & Bloome, 1997; Green, Dixon & Putney, 1998). An ethnographic approach allows situating literacy learning and teaching within the socially constructed frameworks of classroom members’ daily lives.
This research examined the processes involved in students’ gaining access to and actively participating in classroom literacy practices, and how opportunities for literacy learning and teaching were co-constructed by classroom members (teacher and students). It also investigated how students made sense and engaged in literacy practices at the individual and collective level. Of particular interest was how opportunities for literacy learning and development were constructed over time and across contexts (i.e., classroom, school, district and state, and community and family).

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The theoretical and methodological framework used in this study allowed for a comprehensive and situated look at a particular first grade classroom, in a particular school, community, district, and state. Purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) and the selection of an information-rich case supported and provided an in-depth understanding of the nature of literacy learning and teaching in a first grade classroom located in a lower to middle-income community. The findings are not intended to be generalized but to provide a closer, over time look at what constitutes literacy teaching and learning in one classroom. The sampling decisions directly affected the study findings. Different cultural and socioeconomic factors affecting the teacher and students, and families such as personal history, ethnicity, family income, employment, grade level, classroom size, the history and expectations of the school, district and state, etc. would have affected the nature of the meanings and actions constructed in the classroom. On the other hand, this
study provides a methodology and theoretical frame to look at the nature of curriculum co-construction in primary grade classrooms.

Despite the extensive period of data collection involved in this study, it is relevant to note that it only briefly describes the complexity involved in what constituted literacy learning and teaching. First, it is impossible for one person to document all intricate, dynamic and ongoing interactions happening at the classroom level as well as their interdependence, and co-constructed relationship with other contexts. Second, literate and social meanings were constantly being co-constructed based on intertextual links supported by classroom members' prior history and experiences, which were not always disclosed and visible to the researcher. The interdependence among contexts such as the state (and national education) and district was complex, and built through a long period of history. Having lived in the United States for only the past eight years, and having experienced a different education system in Brazil, I was an outsider to this history, and the meanings constructed by classroom and school members. In addition, practical limitations of time did not allow that I spend more time with the focal students' families as well as to visit other families, which would have provided even more information about the students' backgrounds and their community.

Taking into account the characteristics of ethnographic and interpretive research, it is relevant to acknowledge the influence of my own perspectives on how the data was collected and analyzed, as well as the influence of my presence in the classroom. Although member checking through ongoing interactions with the teacher, students and families, was an important part of this study, the final analysis and the organization of
findings reflect my understandings and selection of examples. By being a constant presence in the classroom as a participant observer, I also became part of the classroom community. In this sense, my presence and research equipment, the nature of my collaborative relationship with the teacher, my relationship with the students, and homevisits (particularly to four families) inevitably influenced to some degree the constitution of literacy learning and teaching over the school year.

Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. In this chapter, I have first provided an introduction to the study. In chapter 2, I present an overview of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that guided and informed this study. Chapter 3 explains choices of methodology, and addresses theory-method relationships. It also provides a description of the research site and participants, the data collection and analysis processes, and issues of trustworthiness, credibility and transferability. The findings are described and displayed in two chapters: chapter 4 and 5. First, in chapter 4, I describe the multi-layered context in which classroom opportunities for literacy learning and teaching were embedded and constituted by displaying four layers of context separately: the district (and state standards), the school, the community and family, and the classroom. In chapter 5, I show the co-constructed nature of literacy learning and teaching by tracing pieces of the curriculum and literacy life in the classroom across these four layers of context and over time. Lastly, in chapter 6, I situate the findings within the extant literature, discuss their educational implications, and propose recommendations for future research.
A large body of literature has broadened current understanding of what is literacy, and early literacy learning and/or teaching processes. Major perspectives, such as "readiness" and "emergent literacy" (Crawford, 1995; Teale & Sulzby, 1986), have provided distinct definitions of what is early literacy learning and teaching, which have influenced research and instructional practices. Nevertheless, by describing and measuring literacy learning as a set of cognitive processes acquired within a single ideal developmental continuum (Bloome & Talwalkar, 1997; Solsken, 1993), both readiness and emergent literacy perspectives have overlooked important dimensions of the nature of literacy learning and teaching. Specifically, the social and situated nature of literacy practices. Recent studies, grounded in a sociocultural perspective, have provided new theoretical and methodological lenses to examine literacy learning and/or teaching as situated processes and practices, embedded in a dynamic and complex social context, and co-constructed by students and teacher (e.g., Chandler, 1992, Cochran-Smith, 1984; Collins & Green, 1992; Dyson, 1993; Heath, 1983; Solsken, 1993; Weade, 1992).

Following central themes, I opted to describe the literature within major categories, which may define rigid lines and mask overlaps between the perspectives. The emergent literacy movement has influenced a number of researchers and scholars, who have adopted their assumptions to some degree in addition to incorporating a broader notion of social context.
In this chapter, I present a selective review of the literature on literacy learning and teaching. I focus this review on the conceptual assumptions grounding a sociocultural perspective, which have informed my understanding of the nature of literacy, learning and teaching processes. These conceptual assumptions form the theoretical framework or “mental grid” (Zaharlick & Green, 1991) that has guided this study, and oriented methodological choices and the research process. This chapter is organized within two sections. First, I describe and define a sociocultural perspective. Second, I review four central premises taken from a sociocultural perspective on the nature of learning, and literacy learning and teaching.

A Sociocultural Perspective

The theoretical framework of the present study is grounded in a sociocultural perspective. Sociocultural perspective is used as an inclusive term to refer to a body of research on learning and teaching that has been characterized as sociocultural theory, socioconstruction perspective, and particular studies which locate learning and literacy learning within a larger social, political and cultural contexts. This body of research has been influenced by social and cultural theories developed in anthropology (e.g., ethnography of communication) and sociology (e.g., sociolinguistics, critical perspectives) as well as psychology (particularly Lev Vygotsky's cultural-historical approach) and literary theory (i.e., M. Bakhtin's ideas about language).

This study was particularly informed by a number of ethnographic studies that have examined the nature of classroom life, and learning and/or teaching processes as
socially and culturally situated and constituted (e.g., among others, the work of Chandler, Cochran-Smith, 1984; Collins & Green, 1992; Dyson, 1993, 1995; Green, Kantor & Rogers, 1991; Green, Putney, Dixon & Sena, 1998; Heath, 1983; Solsken, 1993; and Weade, 1992). Classroom-based ethnographic studies have provided relevant examples of ways in which children socialize in particular literacy practices (and literacy communities) within the classroom (e.g., Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Bloome, 1987; Kantor, Miller, & Fernie, 1992; Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, 1992). Ethnographic studies have also revealed that literacy learning in the classroom is influenced by school, family and community ways of being literate and managing knowledge which are embedded within sociopolitical, linguistic and cultural contexts and histories (e.g., Heath, 1983; Kirschner, 1993; Moll, 1991; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Reyes, 1992; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Willis, 1995).

**Conceptual Assumptions**

Informed by a sociocultural perspective, this study draws on four premises on the nature of learning, and literacy learning and teaching: (1) Vygotsky's theory on the social origins of individual learning and development (Cole & Scribner, 1978; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Moll, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985, 1992); (2) the notion of multiple ways of becoming and being literate (Bloome & Green, 1984, 1992; Dyson, 1995; Green, Putney, Dixon & Sena, 1998); (3) the notion of a learning context as involving particular "interactional spaces" (Heras, 1993) and representing multiple layers of context (Bloome, 1987; Bloome & Green, 1992; Cochran-Smith, 1984; Graue &
Walsh, 1998; Rogoff, 1995); and (4) the notion of interdependent and reciprocal relationships between the students and the teacher, and other contexts (Dyson, 1993; Erickson & Schultz, 1997; Floriani, 1997; Weade, 1992).

**On the Nature of Learning**

Over the past years, the nature of learning and development has been described in different ways. Maturationist views, such as the work of Arnold Gesell (Cairns, 1983; Thelen & Adolph, 1992), focus on universal biological norms to describe growth and development. Standard behaviorist views (e.g., the work of B. F. Skinner; Stevenson, 1983) focus on environmental stimulation and stimulus-response associations to describe learning and development. Cognitive constructivist views (e.g., Jean Piaget's work; Piaget, 1983) focus on mechanisms of development (maturation, experience with objects, social experience, and equilibration) and description of the child as an active-organism. At different times, all these learning views have critically influenced and in many cases continue to influence educational practices. For example, in the area of early literacy education, there are various reading defined views such as "readiness as a product of maturation" (influenced by Gesellian developmental psychology), "readiness as a product of experience" (influenced by behaviorist learning theories), and "emergent literacy" perspective (influenced by cognitive-developmental and developmental psycholinguistics studies) (Teale and Sulzby, 1986).

Historically, maturationist views had a critical impact upon the fields of developmental psychology and education in particular from the late 1920s into the 1940s;
behaviorist views were predominant for several decades from the beginning of this century until the early 1960s; and cognitivist views became influential in the late 1950s and 1960s. Cognitive views (e.g., information-processing approach, constructivism, etc.) have gone through revisions, changes and extensions, and continue to critically influence the fields of psychology and education.

More recently, an increased interest in the social and cultural context in which learning occurs has provided a foundation for the development of a sociocultural perspective on the nature of learning (and literacy learning) and development. This increased interest resulted from unanswered questions and research findings that could not fit into cognitive constructivist views' universal claims of the nature of learning and development. In addition, the nature of teaching within the sociocultural context in which it occurs has become further problematized, in contrast to cognitive constructivist's focus on the classroom environment as a facilitator but not as co-structor of what counts as knowledge; behaviorist's value-free environmental descriptions; and maturationist's absence of a focus on environmental influences.

Lev Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory of human intellectual functioning and learning (Cole & Scribner, 1978; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Moll, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985) has had a critical influence upon the development of a sociocultural perspective in education. Of special importance is his understanding of the nature of higher mental processes in the individual, and the role of symbolic mediation (particularly oral and written language) in such processes. Vygotsky argued that (1) “higher mental processes in the individual have their origin in social processes…, [and (2)] mental
processes can be understood only if we understand the tools and signs that mediate them” (Wertsch, 1985, p.14-15).

In contrast to behaviorist and cognitivist views, Vygotsky identified a “dynamic interdependence of social and individual processes.... [and] conceptualized development as the transformation of socially shared activities into internalized processes” [italics in the original] (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p.192). For Vygotsky (1978), "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological)" (p.57). Thus, according to Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory, "in order to understand the individual, one must first understand the social relations in which the individual exists" (Wertsch, 1985, p.58).

Vygotsky’s theory has important relevance to current educational issues such as literacy learning and teaching, and assessment. He considered education as central to the development of higher psychological processes. His concept of the “zone of proximal development” 2 provided an alternative discussion of the relationship between learning and development, and a critique to static measures of individual development such as IQ testing (Moll, 1990). Rather than equal measure or parallel relations, Vygotsky (1978) proposed “highly complex dynamic relations” between developmental and learning processes (p.91). He claimed that

an essential feature of learning is that it creates zones of proximal development; that is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are

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2 The zone of proximal development “is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance of in collaboration with more capable peers” [italics in the original] (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86).
able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement ... [Learning] is not development ... learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized ... psychological functions. (Vygotsky, 1978, p.90)

Vygotsky's concept of the zone emphasizes the interdependence of individual and social (or socially provided resources) developmental processes. It reexamines the notion of development by identifying two levels of development of a child's mental functions: the actual level of development (or completed developmental cycles) and the level of potential development. His concept illustrates the relationship between social and individual levels of development, and reveals the important role played by culture and education in human development. In other words, it implies that "Children's cognitive development is an apprenticeship — it occurs through guided participation in social [and cultural] activity with companions who support and stretch children's understanding of and skill in using the tools of culture" (Rogoff, 1990, p.vii).

The concept of the zone reexamines the importance of formal instruction and children's interaction with more capable others. Nevertheless, this concept does not exclude children's participation and collaboration in their learning and developmental processes. According to Vygotsky,

children internalize and transform the help they receive from others and eventually use these same means of guidance to direct their subsequent problem-solving behaviors (Diaz, Neal, & Amaya-Williams, this volume). Therefore, the nature of social transactions is central to a zone of proximal development analysis ...[and] we should think of the zone as characteristic not solely of the child or of the teaching but of the child engaged in collaborative activity within specific social environments. The focus in on the social system within which we hope children to learn, with the understanding that this social system is mutually and
actively created by teacher and students. This interdependence of adult and child is central to a Vygotskian analysis of instruction [italics in the original]. (Moll, 1990, p.11)

Another important aspect of Vygotsky’s understanding of human development is the notion of semiotic mediated activity, that is, the emergence and use of semiotic mechanisms, including psychological tools (i.e., signs and symbols including language, writing, works of art, various systems of counting, algebraic symbol systems, etc.), which mediate social and individual functioning (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Vygotsky considered psychological tools to be “products of sociocultural evolution;” that is, a product of social life and human social and cultural activity (Wertsch, 1985, p.80). He emphasized the meaningful and communicative function of semiotic mechanisms (for example, language) and their capacity to transform, “alter the entire flow and structure of mental functions” (Vygotsky, 1981, p.137, in Wertsch, 1985, p.79). For example, building on Vygotsky’s examination of the relationship between acquisition of literacy and cognitive development, the work of Scribner and Cole (1981) shows that literacy practices used in different contexts involve “a set of socially organized practices” defined by purposes and contexts of use, and with specific effects on cognitive competencies (p.236).

In short, for Vygotsky, the basic force pushing forward development is the notion of mediation, that is, the use of psychological tools, particularly the way in which they are used and the meaning which they acquire (Knox, 1993). He defined development "in terms of emergence or transformation of forms of mediation, and his notion of social
interaction and its relation to higher mental processes necessarily involves mediational mechanisms" (Wertsch, 1985, p.15). He emphasized the nature of meaning in semiotic mechanisms in that they are used for social purposes. For example, Wertsch (1985) points out that Vygotsky saw as the primary function of language - the most important psychological tool in his approach – “the function of communication, social contact, influencing surrounding individuals” (Vygostky, 1934, p.45, in Wertsch, p.81).

Vygotsky’s ideas on semiotic mediation (especially language), and its role on the nature of knowledge co-construction and development of mental processes, have influenced current understanding of formal instruction and literacy education. The impact of Vygotsky’s ideas can be seen on currently influential research on literacy education (e.g., Clay & Cazden, 1990; Moll, 1990, 1991; Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992) as well as the elaboration of sociocultural views which combine and build on Vygotsky’s theory and other views (e.g., the work of sociolinguistics, Dewey, Freire, and Bakhtin, among others) in order to reconceptualize the nature of literacy learning and/or instruction (e.g., Dyson, 1995; Forman, Minick & Stone, 1993; Green, Putney, Dixon & Sena, 1998; John-Steiner, Panofsky & Smith, 1994; Lima, 1995; Solsken, 1993).

**Literacy Learning and Teaching**

A sociocultural perspective on literacy learning and teaching has grown out of the emergence of a focus on social and cultural processes and practices, and dissatisfaction with universal claims and the generic focus of cognitive perspectives. It has been influenced by the research movement and some of the assumptions grounding the
emergent literacy perspective. Similar to an emergent literacy perspective, a sociocultural perspective: (1) recognizes literacy learning as an ongoing process that begins long before formal schooling begins for children; (2) acknowledges that literacy is facilitated best within a framework of print-rich environment; (3) rejects reading readiness views; (4) values active engagement in meaningful reading (authentic literature) and writing (original texts); and (5) views children as active meaning makers (Crawford, 1995). At the same time, a sociocultural perspective extends emergent literacy assumptions in that it examines the social and cultural processes in which early literacy learning is embedded.

Instead of viewing literacy as “a fixed or variable set of cognitive processes” (Bloome & Talwalkar, 1997, p.109), sociocultural researchers explain cognitive processes involved in reading and writing as constrained and shaped by socially constructed meanings and literacy practices. Thus, a sociocultural perspective argues that literacy learning (and teaching), rather than viewed as an individual act and accomplishment, needs to be addressed within the sociocultural contexts in which it occurs. In other words, it argues for a “situated approach,” which considers learning and teaching processes “as situationally defined in the ways in which teachers and students construct the patterns of classroom life in each classroom” (Collins & Green, 1992, p.60). Similarly, the curriculum (literacy curriculum, for example) is defined as locally constituted and situated. That is, the curriculum does not exist without a context; it is “part of a number of overlapping and integrated contexts which give meaning to the curricular experiences for participants” (King, 1986, p.37).
According to a sociocultural view, learning to be literate (in multiple literacies) is "tied to learning to interpret - and potentially, to reinterpret - the social world and one's place in it" (Dyson, 1995, p.6). In this sense, literacy learning is a situated process in that participation in culturally situated practices across settings (e.g., classrooms, homes, discipline-based groups, and workplaces) supports the development of "particular types of readers and writers ... and particular types of discourses processes and practices associated with membership in each setting" (Green, Putney, Dixon & Sena, 1998).

A sociocultural perspective examines literacy (and literacy learning) in the context of social practices, and the nature of cognitive processes involved in learning to read and write is situated in social and linguistic contexts (Bloome & Green, 1984). For example, the ground-breaking work of Scribner & Cole (1981) has provided new insights into the nature of literacy in socially organized practices. Based on cross-cultural findings, Scribner and Cole (1981) have argued that "Literacy is not simply knowing how to read and write a particular script but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use" (p.236). Important assumptions underlying a sociocultural perspective involve the understanding that there are multiple ways of being literate (Bloome & Green, 1992), and that "literacy is both a product of and a cultural tool for a social group" (Green, Putney, Dixon & Sena, 1998).

For a sociocultural perspective, there are multiple ways of being literate, and as Gee (1989) puts it, "literacies or discourses (not a single literacy or discourse associated with the dominant group in society) are varieties of ways of using language and of behaving and interacting within the social context" (in Mitchell, 1989, p.4). For example,
Young children from diverse backgrounds bring diverse experiences to symbol-producing — talking, drawing, playing, storytelling, and, in our society, some kind of experience with print, all of which are resources with which both teachers and children can build new possibilities. (Dyson, 1993, p.7).

Literacy is viewed as multiple literacies instead of a single definition of literacy. It involves "social and cultural practices and actions ... that vary across cultures ... communities ... technologies ... and across situations even within the same setting" (Bloome & Green, 1992, p.50). In other words,

Text is but one way in which we express our literacy. We not only read and write (make sense of and from) the alphabet in connected passages, but we also read other types of symbols embedded in social practice and institutions and write other types of symbols through our social action to define ourselves and affirm our cultural and social histories. (Shannon, 1992, p.1)

Within a sociocultural perspective, literacy learning in the classroom has also been described in cultural terms: "literacy meanings are constructed through the values, practices, routines and rituals of members of a sociocultural community" (Kantor, Miller & Fernie, 1992, p.186). Being exposed to formal instruction involves learning to speak (and write) speech genres and registers of particular languages, as well as learning the specific contexts in which variants are allowed to be used (Wertsch, 1991). Children bring different speech genres to their classroom experiences and in their texts they may move among varied social arenas which reflect languages used in the classroom and in the communities in which they live (Daiute, 1993; Dyson, 1993).

In addition, influenced by critical perspectives (e.g., critical theory, critical literacy and feminist perspectives), sociocultural studies have examined the historical, political,
cultural, and social dimensions of literacy. These studies have examined issues of power relations in society and how knowledge (what counts as literacy learning and instruction) and power are interrelated (e.g., Delpit, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Reyes, 1992; Solsken, 1993; Willis, 1995). They take into account the ideologies that underlie relations of power, and the relationship between power and knowledge, in the classroom as well as within a larger social and political context. These studies also address the complexities of culture, especially the cultures of historically oppressed groups, and criticize a common, narrow, ethnocentric view of school literacy in which "teachers often fail to make adjustments in their approaches to literacy for culturally and linguistically diverse learners" (Willis, p.43). In other words, becoming a literate person involves not only the acquisition of knowledge on reading and writing processes but also involves learning particular practices of reading and writing. As a result, depending on the learning circumstances, children may experience schooled literacy practices as alienating or even discriminating against their home and community sociocultural experiences.

Currently influential studies have supported the importance of locating literacy learning and/or instruction within the sociocultural context in which it occurs (e.g., literacy practices developed at school), as well as taking into account (and capitalizing on) the distinct socio-historical and cultural contexts that children come from by developing a cultural bridge between the home and school culture (Auerbach, 1989; Delpit, 1995; Dyson, 1993; Heath, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Moll, 1991, 1997; Wolf, 1993). For example, educational initiatives such as the Kamehameha Early Education
Program (KEEP), developed in Hawaii, demonstrate how children initially assessed as among the lowest in reading achievement by national norms, through participation in culturally-sensitive educational practices, began to perform at higher levels, well above standard norms (Au & Jordan, 1981; Lubeck, 1994). The ethnographic studies of Heath (1983) and Ladson-Billings (1994) also illustrate the critical role of culturally-relevant teaching practices by linking home and community practices with school and classroom practices, and consequently, contributing to academic success. In addition, studies of households' funds of knowledge (Moll, 1997; Moll et al., 1992) highlight the complex functions of children's households within their social and historical contexts. These studies demonstrate how teachers' active involvement in ethnographic studies of households contributes to the development of instructional activities which mediate between children's (and their families') lives and classroom experiences, and have the potential to improve children's academic development.

“What Counts” as Learning Context

Sociocultural researchers argue that the classroom learning environment is more than its physical setting and the types of materials used or developed for academic purposes. It also involves: the organization and definition of time-task limits and space-function ties (Heath, 1983); the temporal organization of conversation (Erickson, 1996; Mehan, 1982); students' sociocultural and linguistic background and real-life experiences (Heath, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 1994); different forms of discourse and joint activity (Hicks, 1995); roles and relationships, rights and obligations, among the members of the
classroom; rituals and routines (cultural practices jointly constructed by the teacher and students); and a common cultural knowledge about the types of events and the types of outcomes (Green, Dixon, Putney & Sena, 1998; Green, Kantor & Rogers, 1991). In this sense, beyond the surface of its physical appearance, classroom contexts (rather than a static context) are constituted by particular “interactional spaces” (Heras, 1993; Green et al., 1998) involving shared meanings and definitions of social appropriateness marked by distinct patterns of organization of time and space, purpose, and interactional norms (Cochran-Smith, 1984) and forms of discourse and social activity. For example, classroom contexts, like circle time or reading group (and any other context such as a library, restaurant or living room), are marked and interactionally constituted by a different set of social roles, and modes of discourse and activity. In other words, participating in a whole class discussion is very different than engaging in symbolic play with peers (Hicks, 1995). Thus, each form of classroom activity involves distinct participant (or participation) structures or unique configurations in the ways of participating socially and linguistically (Erickson & Schultz, 1997; Phillips, 1972). In addition, teacher and students in interaction become contexts for each other. As Erickson and Schultz (1997) explain,

Contexts are not simply given in the physical setting (kitchen, living room, sidewalk in front of drug store) nor in combinations of personnel (two brothers, husband and wife, firemen). Rather, contexts are constituted by what people are doing and where and when they are doing it. As McDermott put it succinctly (1976a), people in interaction become environments for each other. Ultimately, social contexts consist of mutually shared and ratified definitions of situation and in the social actions persons take on the basis of those definitions (Mehan et al., 1976). (p.22)
Over time and across events throughout the school year, students and teacher construct mutually shared meanings and definitions of appropriate ways of interacting socially and linguistically that define the set of participant structures associated with different classroom activities. For example, forms of discourse are selected upon the recognition of commonly defined situational contexts (John-Steiner, Panofsky & Smith, 1994). In sum, contexts “shape and are shaped by individuals, tools [e.g., literacy practices], resources, intentions, and ideas in a particular setting, within a particular time ... Contexts are fluid and dynamic, constantly reconstituting themselves within activity” (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p.11).

Contexts are constituted by classroom members’ perceptions and frames of reference. For example, cultural differences in the organization of participant structures can generate misunderstandings and conflict (e.g., different cultural values and ways of presenting knowledge). In this way, the nature of one's position and participation in the classroom social life influences "the extent to which one picks up, appropriates as one's own, the skills and ways of thinking valued by the group" (Goodnow, 1993, p.373). In many cases, successful participation in literacy practices in classroom contexts requires students to create parallel cultural identities or disconnect themselves from family and community cultural values (Bloome & Green, 1992).

This notion of classroom contexts is closely linked to the notion of discourse repertoires or practices; that is, “the social activity of making meanings with language and other symbolic systems in some particular kind of situation or setting” (Lemke, 1995, p.6). The recognition of classroom contexts (e.g., whole group discussion vs. reading
group) defines forms of discourse; in other words, "socially, culturally, historically developed frames" through which the teacher and students construct and understand meaning (John-Steiner et al., p.38). Language serves as an important mediator in the process of constructing shared meanings and actions in classrooms and other educational settings. In learning to read and write, children are learning discourse practices (e.g., multiple literacies) that involve specific ways of interacting, seeing, knowing, valuing, speaking, reading, and writing (e.g., fiction vs. scientific writing). Therefore, through participation in classroom activities, children may appropriate "the discourses that situationally define "what counts" as knowing [and reading and writing] within disciplines" (Hicks, 1995, p.61).

Classroom contexts create opportunities for students to learn new social and academic discourse repertoires (Kantor, Green, Bradley & Lin, 1992). Meaning and modes of classroom discourses are constructed over time and across events, that is, they are “intertextually” constituted:

We make sense of every word, utterance or act against the background of (some) other words, utterances, or acts of a similar kind. This implies, of course, that it is very important to understand just which other texts [events or occasions] a particular community considers relevant to the interpretation of any given text. (Lemke, 1995, p.23)

The notion of intertextual ties has important educational implications. It implies that an event or text is not "complete or autonomous in itself: it needs to be read, and it is read, in relation to other texts [or contexts]" (Lemke, p.41).
The notion of intertextuality is also important because it marks the presence of ties not only across time and activity in the classroom but also between children's home, community and classroom experiences. For example, Dyson's (1993) work and discussion of sociocultural depth (based on Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia) address the complexity of children's social world and the embeddeness of varied social dialogues in children's texts. As argued by Hicks (1995), "Classrooms are embedded communities of discourse; they can never be divorced from the community-based language practices that children bring with them" (p.75).

On the other hand, unfortunately, often the construction of classroom discourse repertoires or practices is not a smooth process for all students. Individual students bring to the classroom community-based language practices, values and ways of acting and believing that may be similar or quite distinct from the classroom discourse practices. For instance, distinct discourse practices "may be juxtaposed in ways that would appear to some teachers (or other adults) to be unscientific or perhaps simply atypical within a given activity structure" (Hicks, 1995, p.81). Heath's (1983) ethnographies of communication of three diverse communities provide a clear example of how the children's community-based discourse practices may support or create misunderstandings in classroom learning. Heath's as well as Ladson-Billings' (1994) study also indicate that teachers' attempts to develop culturally relevant teaching practices can enhance students' opportunity to learn in the classroom contexts. Nevertheless, as Bloome & Green's (1992) review of research on educational contexts of literacy reveals, classroom and school organizations can also enable differentiation on basis of social and cultural competence.
Sociocultural studies have examined literacy learning as a socially constructed activity by focusing on one or more layers of context other than the classroom context. For example, Cochran-Smith's (1984) ethnographic study illustrates the interrelated nature of different layers of context. Cochran-Smith found different layers of contexts that facilitate and surround storyreading: the classroom activity of rug-time, off-the-rug activities, the general nursery-school environment, and the community's belief system associated with literacy (children's home and community cultures). Additionally, the social and ideological agendas of communities involved with the nursery-school (e.g., the teachers' home and community cultural values) also influence classroom literacy events. Further, social and ideological agendas, and policy decisions made at various levels of government and administration form another layer of context that affects the ways in which classroom literacy events are defined (Bloome, 1987; Bloome & Green, 1992). All these layers of context are interrelated, inseparable and reciprocally influence each other. As an example, the school's general organization of time places limits on what can happen in the classroom, but what happens in the classroom can also influence new definitions of time.

Taking a sociocultural perspective, Rogoff (1995) identifies three possible planes of analysis: personal, interpersonal and community. According to Rogoff, these planes are not hierarchical, they involve different "grains of focus" with the whole sociocultural activity:

To understand each requires the involvement of the others. Distinguishing them serves the function of clarifying the plane of focus that may be chosen for one or another discussion of processes in the whole activity, holding the other planes of focus in the background but not separated. (p.141-142)
An important assumption underlying these planes of analysis is that learning and development involves all these processes, and literacy learning can not be explained as an individual act but as a situated event in which meanings are created and recreated at personal, interpersonal and community planes of action. In this sense, classroom contexts are inseparable from other layers of context. As Erickson (1982) explains,

The immediate environment ... is embedded in wider environments of interaction up and out to the level of society as a whole and to the level of intersocietal interaction. The individual usually encounters information stored through symbols that have a history of culturally shared learning and use. Thus the individual may be indirectly influenced not only across space, but across time. (p.151-152)

In sum, the local context (e.g., the classroom context), where locally and situated interactions evolve cannot be isolated from the larger context. “The local context is embedded in many larger nested and overlapping contexts” (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p.10). As Graue & Walsh illustrates, “The block area is nested within the day care room, which is nested within the center, which is nested, for example, within the local day care network, the larger discourse on day care, and a given culture” (p.10). In essence, literacy meanings constructed in classroom contexts are intertextually tied to other layers of contexts. Children's history and sociocultural experiences and cultural values are embedded within their classroom experiences. These experiences and values are naturally used as frames of reference as children try to make sense of the new contexts and discourse practices constructed in the classroom. They can also be the source of miscommunication in the organization of participant structures in classroom activities.
Children's experiences and cultural values are not always used and acknowledged as important resources (or "funds of knowledge" as described by Luis Moll and his research colleagues). Fortunately, accounts of successful teaching experiences (e.g., Heath, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 1994) demonstrate that teachers can take into account this body of knowledge and co-construct a permeable curriculum (Dyson, 1993); one which is culturally sensitive, builds spaces for children's sociocultural worlds, and recognizes links between children's home and school experiences.

Dialectical Relationships: The Interdependence of Teaching and Learning Processes

Literacy learning and teaching is shaped by the interactional spaces locally defined and constituted through ongoing social interaction among teacher-students, teacher-student, and student-student. In these contexts, teacher and students take on reciprocal or dialectical roles. In learning classroom literacy practices and becoming a member of a classroom community, students are not only "map-readers," they are also "map-makers" (Frake, 1977, cited in Spradley, 1980, p.9). They actively participate in the construction of meanings and development of a shared classroom culture. As Weade (1992) points out, the belief that teaching (with the same materials and training) causes learning (of the same concepts and skills) is a myth. ... [It] is not just teaching that brings about learning. Rather, opportunities for learning are embedded within a complex and dynamically evolving social context that is co-constructed by students and teacher as they affiliate over time in pursuit of instructional and curricular goals (Green et al., 1991; Lemke, 1990) [italics in the original]. (p.95)
A sociocultural perspective emphasizes the multifaceted and complementary nature of the roles taken by children, peers, and adults in the classroom. It views teaching and learning as "dialectical social processes:"

By looking at the relationships that are possible and constructed between members (i.e., people) and between members and texts, contexts, and content, we begin to construct a more holistic, situated view of what counts as being a student, learner, teacher, as well as knowledge in that particular class. We can thus come to understand teaching and learning as dialectical social processes (Floriani, 1997, p.353).

Thus, in many occasions, the teacher is also a learner and the learner is also a teacher (Dewey, 1916). By paying attention to children's intertextual ties and ways of participating and communicating in classroom contexts, the teacher becomes a learner of children's varied ways of using symbolic tools (such as reading and writing), interacting and constructing knowledge with peers, and creating (and recreating) knowledge and links between classroom and home experiences. In this sense, the despite common characteristics with other classrooms, each classroom has unique characteristics (Green, Kantor & Rogers, 1991): the teacher, the students and even the materials selected all have prior histories (Chandler, 1992). Consequently, each class creates a unique culture in which children's ways of acting, interpreting and communicating shape and are shaped by the classroom group.

Summary

The theoretical framework presented in this chapter identifies the lenses, the orienting conceptual assumptions underlying this study. By adopting a sociocultural
perspective, I assume (1) “a dynamic interdependence between social and individual processes in the construction of knowledge” which is mediated by semiotic mechanisms (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p.192); (2) a “situated approach” to the nature of literacy practices; that is, the notion of multiple ways of becoming and being literate (Bloome & Green, 1984, 1992; Collins & Green, 1992; Dyson, 1995); (3) the notion of the local context as “embedded in many larger nested and overlapping contexts” (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p.10); and (4) the interrelated and reciprocal nature of teaching and learning processes (Dyson, 1993; Floriani, 1997; Weade, 1992). Additionally, my understanding of the nature of literacy learning and teaching has been informed by an emergent literacy perspective, particularly by understanding literacy learning and teaching as (1) an ongoing process that begins long before formal schooling begins for children, (2) best promoted within a literacy-rich environment, and (3) supported by children’s active engagement in meaningful reading and writing experiences (Clay, 1991; Crawford, 1995; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Teale & Suzby, 1986).

These central themes form the theoretical framework or mental grid guiding my epistemological assumptions on the nature of classroom life and knowledge construction, particularly literacy learning and teaching. As I discuss in chapter 3, these theoretical assumptions have oriented this study’s choice of methodology and process of data collection and analysis. Specifically, guided by a sociocultural view of literacy teaching and learning, I adopted an interpretive and ethnographic approach taking into account their focus on phenomenon and meaning making as “situated, historically, socially and
culturally” (Graue & Walsh, 1998), and “the sociocultural substantiality of ethnographic inquiry” (Hymes, 1982, p.30).

Informed by studies that have examined the situated nature of literacy learning and/or teaching processes, this study takes a comprehensive and over time look on the nature of literacy learning and teaching in a particular first grade classroom. Taking into account the complexity of classroom life and process of curriculum enactment, this study further builds on a “situated perspective” on the nature of classroom life and literacy practices (Green & Bloome, 1997; Green & Meyer, 1991; Kantor, Elgas & Fernie, 1993; Weade, 1992). It takes up the challenge previously taken by Cochran-Smith’s (1984) and Solsken’s (1993) ethnographic studies, which take a comprehensive look at multiple contexts in order to understand the interplay of local contexts and larger contexts as opportunities for literacy learning are constructed in the classroom. Further, it provides a closer and over-time look at the nature of one teacher’s decision-making and actions over the course of one school year.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I present the methodological framework that has guided this study, including a description of the study’s data collection and analysis processes. I begin with a brief overview of the framework focusing on theory-method relationships, that is, how the theoretical framework that informed this study shaped its methodology. In the second section of this chapter, I present a complete description of the study including the selection of the research site, issues of access and entry, the site and its participants, and the roles of the researcher. Included too in this section are data collection methods (the ethnographic tools used for data collection across phases of data collection) and analysis methods. In the final section, I discuss issues of trustworthiness, credibility and transferability.

Methodological Framework

The overarching question guiding this study is: *What is the nature of literacy learning and teaching in a particular first grade classroom?* To address this question, the following four related sub-questions were explored: (1) What are the opportunities for literacy learning in this classroom? How are literacy practices defined across events and
over time? (2) How do students engage in and construct opportunities for literacy learning (at the individual and collective level)? (3) How are the opportunities for literacy learning and teaching shaped and co-constructed by the students and teacher (as well as by other contexts)? (4) What is the interplay between the students and teacher’s understandings of literacy learning and teaching?

The above questions and a particular theoretical framework, grounded in a sociocultural perspective (as described in the previous chapter), guided my choices of method in fundamental ways. In other words, my methodological decisions involved particular ontological and epistemological premises on the nature of classroom life and knowledge that were consistent with my orienting theories. Thus, assuming a view of literacy learning and teaching as socially and culturally situated processes (Chandler, 1992; Cochran-Smith, 1984; Collins & Green, 1992; Dyson, 1993; Heath, 1983; Solsken, 1993; Weade, 1992), I adopted an interpretive approach and ethnographic perspective to understand their situated nature. In the following sections, I explore these theory-method relationships, briefly describe interpretive and ethnographic research as well as address the implications of using them as methodological frames.
The idea of a theory-method linkage means that how you study the world determines what you learn about the world. (Patton, 1990, p.67)

The theoretical framework is the basic belief system or worldview (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) or, put another way, the conceptual framework or mental grid (Zaharlick & Green, 1991) that guides the researcher's methodological assumptions and decisions. This basic belief system or mental grid "suggests ways of conceptualizing the phenomena of interest as well as factors that the researchers may need to consider for the specific group under study" (Zaharlick & Green, p.213). Thus, it creates a context for inquiry. In this study, a sociocultural perspective on the nature of learning and teaching formed the mental grid or theoretical framework guiding methodological assumptions and choices of methods for collecting and analyzing data, as well as ontological and epistemological assumptions on the nature of reality and knowledge. Grounded in sociocultural studies, I assume the nature of learning and teaching processes as socially and culturally situated and constituted. I view literacy as cultural and social phenomena (Bloome & Green, 1992), involving "a set of socially organized practices" defined by purposes and contexts of use (Scribner & Cole, 1981, p.236).

An interpretive approach to inquiry best suited this study's questions and conceptual framework because of its focus on phenomenon and meaning making as "situated, historically, socially and culturally" (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p.xvi). At the same time, by assuming a view of literacy learning and teaching as socially and culturally situated and constituted, an ethnographic perspective and methods (e.g., prolonged
engagement, participant observation, field notes, etc.) were chosen because of their "sociocultural substantiality" (Hymes, 1982, p.30). Ethnographic studies of classroom practices view classroom as cultures and focus on discovering and understanding meanings and patterns of behavior from an emic point of view, that is, as constructed and from the point of view of classroom members (e.g., the teacher and students) involved in these practices.

On Interpretive Research Methodology

The choice of an interpretive approach for this study relates to its focus of inquiry on the meaning of human action in cultural context and social life (Erickson, 1986; Gaskins, Miller & Corsaro, 1992). The goals of an interpretive approach is to understand situated or local meanings of actions and lived experience from the point of view of those who live it (Erickson, 1986; Rossman & Rallis, 1998; Schwandt, 1994), and to construct a narrative or thick description of the meaning-making process involving these actions (Geertz, 1973). Human actions or children’s individual experiences are located/situated in their particular social, cultural and historical contexts (Graue & Walsh, 1998).

What makes a study interpretive is not a matter of data collection procedure but of focus and intent in which the “immediate (often intuitive) meanings of actions to the actors involved are of central interest” (Erickson, 1986, p.120). Narrative description and observation methods may be used in other research methodologies (e.g., positivist studies); however, ontological and epistemological differences, and shifts in the locus of understanding lead to different findings and conclusions. The locus of understanding for
positivist studies is on the objective observer in contrast to interpretive research’s interest in subjective worldviews and local meanings of actions from individual perspectives (Rossman & Rallis, 1998).

Additionally, interpretive research considers local meanings with reference to broad organizational, social and cultural resources:

As everyday life is more and more conducted within formally organized settings, the formulation of meaning becomes decidedly public – deprivatized – as it is conditioned by organizationally promoted ways of making sense of experience. Indeed, the organizational embeddedness of experience has so diversified the meaning of self and our social relations as to transform modern institutional life into a postmodern form. ... Experience constituted in a particular organization or setting may take on the general qualities that the organization or setting promotes, but interpretation also is practical, artfully maneuvering what is locally available and circumstantial. (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994, p.268)

Thus, individual actions need to be contextualized beyond individual heads and classroom walls taking into account relations among contemporaries, links with community standards and ideals, power relations and cultural-historical forces (Graue & Walsh, 1998). Local actions and meaning occurring at the local context need to be linked to the larger context. Considering the embeddedness of local actions, in this study, individual actions and actor’s point of view were examined within multiple layers of context (i.e., classroom local context, home and community context, and school and district contexts).

In practical terms, interpretive fieldwork research involves prolonged and face-to-face contact in field settings (e.g., school and classroom settings) through participant observation. It requires “being unusually thorough and reflective in noticing and
describing everyday events in the field setting, and in attempting to identify the significance of actions in the events from the various points of view of the actors themselves" (Erickson, 1986, p.121). It involves narrative and theory building research (Graue & Walsh, 1998) grounded in the development of recognizable analytical categories, cultural patterns, and themes. Interpretive research is shaped by interpretive resources that are “locally available, recognized, accepted, making meaningful experience – its perception, representation, and authenticity – a socially rather than privately constructed phenomenon (Silverman, 1987)” (in Holstein & Gubrium, 1994, p. 267). In this approach, interpretation and reinterpretation of the meaning of local actions involves a constant and recursive process in which the researcher’s access to individual experiences is mediated by “multiple layers of experience, theirs and ours, and multiple layers of theory, big-T and little-t. Researchers look less at children directly – or at teachers or politicians or cells – than at socially constructed images of these entities” (Miller, 1998, p.37). Consequently, a major emphasis in interpretive research is through its “inherent reflectiveness … make the familiar strange and interesting again” (Erickson, 1986, p.121).

On Ethnography

Using ethnography as a strategy of interpretive inquiry for studying classroom life entails a series of underlying conceptual frameworks or orienting principles with roots in anthropology and sociology. These orienting principles involve theories of culture and social action that guide and frame the research questions, the data collection and field
methods (e.g., participant observation, interviewing, artifact analysis, and document analysis), and the approach to analysis (Green, Dixon & Putney, 1998). Central to this way of looking at classroom life and literacy learning and teaching is the "belief that the meaning of all human behavior, including print-related behaviors and habits, is embedded within social and cultural contexts" (Cochran-Smith, 1984, p.254). Consistent with the theoretical framework guiding this study, ethnographic inquiry assumes a relationship between culture and behavior (the observed), and an understanding of culture as being "expressed (or constituted) only by the actions and words of its members and must be interpreted by, not given to, a fieldworker. ... Culture is not itself visible, but is made visible only through its representation" (Van Maanen, 1988, p.3).

This study adopted an ethnographic perspective because of "the sociocultural substantiality of ethnographic inquiry" (Hymes, 1982):

Whatever one's focus of inquiry, as a matter of course one takes into account the local form of general properties of social life -- patterns of role and status, rights and duties, differential command of resources, transmitted values, environmental constraints. It locates the local situation in space, time, and kind, and discovers its particular forms and center of gravity ... (p.30)

In this sense, ethnographic studies of classroom practices are not a matter of using a pre-established system of coding but of discovering and understanding meanings and patterns of behavior from an emic point of view. Thus, using ethnography as logic of inquiry reduces and prevents the risk of ethnocentric bias (the risk of an action being taken as similar to the meaning of the same action in another culture) and decontextualized comparisons (Gaskins, Miller & Corsaro, 1992). Ethnographic studies of literacy learning
(using micro- and macro-ethnographic approaches) within the classroom, school, community and/or home environments have been informative for taking an insider perspective, and providing detailed descriptions of meanings of literacy that are constructed within and across specific contexts. These studies represent a shift from traditional research in education in that, rather than relying in large-scale surveys, correlational studies, or exclusively quantitative studies, ethnographic studies provide detailed "descriptions of what actually happens to children as they learn to use language and form their values about its structures and functions ... [and] what children do to become and remain acceptable members of their own communities" (Heath, 1983, p.8).

The use of ethnography as a strategy of inquiry in education has provided a new avenue to examine and describe literacy learning, practices and processes for individual children within the context of their social group. Ethnographic research in education has previously focused on classroom language studies and more recently it has also looked at learning in classrooms. The findings of ethnographic studies of how learning and knowledge are socially constructed in classrooms problematize traditional definitions of basic concepts such as learning, achievement, lesson, accomplishment, competence, teaching, etc. (Green & Bloome, 1997):

Learning in classrooms is a problematic construct because, among other reasons, teachers and students, in situ, hold definitions of what counts as learning and what does not count as learning and may orient their behavior to those definitions. (p.192)

Guided by social and cultural theories, ethnography as a logic of inquiry has provided new tools to both examine classroom learning practices from an emic (insider's)
perspective, and to explore how cultural practices shape what is available to be learned as well as what is learned. It is relevant to note that although the researcher cannot get into the actors’ and participants’ mind, the goal in ethnographic inquiry is to “search for evidence of their worldviews” (Rossman and Rallis, 1998, p.40).

Ethnographers “may elect to take a more ‘focused’ look at particular aspects or elements of everyday life either within a more comprehensive ethnography or as a topic-oriented approach to ethnography (Hymes, 1982)” (in Zaharlick & Green, 1991, p.207). This study involves a “topic-oriented ethnography” (Spradley, 1980) in that it consists of a close examination of the role of literacy in the life of a first grade classroom. Nevertheless, it takes a comprehensive approach by looking at the nature of literacy learning and teaching over time in the total way of life in the classroom.

This study adopted ethnography as “logic-of-inquiry” (Gee & Green, 1998) and specific ethnographic methods (or tools) in order to avoid the overgeneralizing tendencies of traditional educational research, and to examine and document the nature of classroom life and local meanings of actions as constructed and from the perspectives of classroom members (teacher and students). It was informed by a number of important and informative literacy studies that have used ethnography as logic-of-inquiry to examine literacy learning in classrooms and/or its embeddeness in wider cultural contexts (e.g., Bloome, 1987; Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Cochran-Smith, 1984; Green, Dixon, Putney & Sena, 1998; Heath, 1983; Kantor, Miller, & Fernie, 1992; Kirschner, 1993; Moll, 1991; Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992; Santa Barbara Discourse Group, 1992; Solsken, 1993; Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). These ethnographic studies have
provided new tools to both examine classroom learning practices from an emic (insider's) perspective, and to explore how cultural practices shape what is available to be learned as well as what is learned. As Cochran-Smith (1984) explains, an ethnographic perspective allows

[a] way of looking at early literacy based on the systematic search for patterns of literacy behavior in particular cultures or social groups. Such an approach allows us to see literacy as a social and cultural phenomenon that can organize events for children and adults and can be organized by children and adults for their own purposes ...

... With an ethnographic view, we can document children in the process of becoming literate; we can see their emerging and developing literacy as it occurs in everyday situations. Rather than seeing literacy as an endpoint based on a theory of what children need to know in order to become literate, we can see what children actually do know about print, and we can gain insights about how they come to know it. (pp. 255-256)

Conducting an ethnography requires a large commitment on the part of the researcher as well as other people involved. My process of documenting and learning from children in their process of becoming literate, and from the teacher in her process of ongoing decision-making was dependent on the relationship we built throughout the process, and involved becoming part of their community. The selection of the research site and participants, the process of gaining entry and developing rapport, the nature of my collaboration with the teacher, and the roles I took during the study were critical for the development of this study, particularly, being able to build a relationship in which the teacher, students and families felt comfortable to share their perspectives.
The Research Site and Participants

This study was developed in a k-4 public elementary school located in a small city (19,000 population) with a diverse cultural and socioeconomic distribution. The city is close, about ten miles, to a mid-size fast growing Midwestern city (about 1,000,000).

As shown in figure 3.1, the school, Highwood Elementary, had an enrollment of approximately 400 students, who were predominantly from European-American ethnicity, including many students of Appalachian heritage. The school’s teaching staff was also predominantly European-American. The school’s attendance area serves lower to middle income families. Twenty-five percent of the students were on free or reduced lunch. The average family income in the school’s district is $30,000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>- School (k-4 elementary school)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Total enrollment: Fall = 385; Winter = 377; Spring = 370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Background (FY97): 90.4% White; 7.8% Black; 0.8% Hispanic; 1% Asian, Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Family’s average income in the district (FY97): 30,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Teaching Staff**               |
|• Number of teachers: 25 |
|• Background: 99% White; 1% Black (part-time) |
|• Number of teachers with Master’s Degree: 17 |
|• Average teacher experience: 9.92 years |

| - Classroom (grade: first)       |
|• Number of students: Fall = 26; Winter = 25; Spring = 23 |
|• Background (total of 27 students): 85% White; 15% Black |
|• Sex (total of 27 students): Female: 14; Male = 13 |

Figure 3.1 Demographic Information of the Research Site

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1 All names, including the research site and participants, are pseudonyms.
Research participants were a first grade teacher, Julie Boyd, twenty-seven students ² (particularly a group of seven focal students), and the families of five focal students. A detailed description of the school context and research participants is provided in chapter 4, as well as maps of the school (figure 4.4, p.116) and classroom (figure 4.11 and 4.12, p.189 and 190).

Selection of the Research Site

A “purposeful sampling” approach (Patton, 1990) guided my selection of the research site and participants. As Patton explains, “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling” [italics in the original] (p. 169). Purposeful sampling strategies and logic, such as intensity sampling and maximum variation sampling, informed the selection of an information-rich case (a particular first grade teacher and classroom) and cases (focal students).

I used “intensity sampling” (Patton, 1990) considering the purpose of the study, which was to investigate the nature of literacy learning and teaching in a classroom representing “the phenomenon of interest intensely (but not extremely)” (Patton, 1990, p.171). The selected site is not an unusual classroom; however, it has a well-respected literacy program (as described in the next chapter), which allowed a rich example of the nature of literacy learning and teaching processes. Maximum variation sampling was used

² Mrs. Boyd had a total of 29 students during the school year. The families of two students did not sign the consent forms.
in the selection of focal students. The teacher and I selected students representing different literacy background and experiences (as described in more detail below). The purpose was to examine variations in classroom experiences and on the process of becoming literate as well as core elements and shared outcomes at the individual and classroom collective levels.

Criteria for Selection of Research Site

My process of selecting the teacher and classroom site was informed by prior "exploratory work" (Patton, 1990), which clarified and helped define the criteria used for intensity sampling. During my doctoral studies, I had opportunities to be in close contact with different public schools as part of graduate assistantships or graduate coursework. These opportunities allowed me to develop relationships with teachers and to learn about their literacy curricula and educational philosophy. In the winter of 1998, for a course assignment in a doctoral seminar on early literacy, I spent time in three classrooms (1 kindergarten; and 2 first-second grade classrooms) observing literacy events and practices. I interviewed each teacher regarding her view and experience on literacy learning and teaching. The selection of these classrooms was informed by my prior contact with one of the teachers, and knowledge of her expertise and the high level of reading and writing achievement of her kindergarten students, and by the other two teachers long-term collaboration with my university’s pre-service program and faculty. The kindergarten classroom was located in an urban public school in a low
socioeconomic area, and the other two classrooms were located in a suburban public school in an affluent area.

This project or exploratory work, although not a pilot study, informed the criteria for site selection and overall development of my research proposal. It provided prior information and more refined criteria for the use of intensity sampling and the selection of an information-rich site. First, this exploratory work helped me clarify the focus of the research project and selection of grade level. I decided to pursue the study in a first or first-second grade classroom. I realized that for the purpose of investigating the nature of literacy learning and teaching, a first grade instead of a kindergarten classroom would provide a wider range of both literacy learning experiences and ongoing teaching decisions addressing students' needs. This exploratory work also helped me clarify three other important criteria for the site selection: (1) a teacher with expertise in literacy education who promoted a range of classroom literacy experiences based upon a holistic, integrated and literature-based curricula; (2) an experienced teacher who would be interested in having ongoing conversations about her/his literacy curriculum and decision making process; and (3) a classroom and school community with students representing diverse socioeconomic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

After this exploratory work, I considered possible research sites. I also contacted university faculty and fellow doctoral students, and gathered the names and telephone numbers of other teachers who were also described as experienced and highly skilled elementary school teachers. Julie Boyd was one of them. Our first contact was through a phone conversation. She had been contacted by one of my committee members, with
whom she had a long-term collaborative relationship through a professional development program. In our phone conversation, she demonstrated interest and we scheduled a meeting to talk more about the nature of my research project. We met at her school, Highwood Elementary, during summer break. In our first meeting, I explained in more detail the nature of the research, data collection methods and schedule, and asked Mrs. Boyd questions about her interest in the project and benefits she would perceive from being involved in this research. We talked about her teaching experience at Highwood, and her goals for the upcoming year and her new first grade classroom. Throughout our meeting, she demonstrated interest and enthusiasm for the project.

Through our conversations and based on prior information, Mrs. Boyd’s background, expertise, interest and grade level fit well in my previously defined criteria of an information-rich site. Although I had not been in Highwood before, I had known about the high quality of the school’s language arts program, and their involvement in a Professional Development Schools University Partnership project. Highwood is known for its strong literature-based program, and actively engaged teaching community. The school’s population was not as diverse as I had planned on; however, Mrs. Boyd’s background, interest in the research project and time commitment were decisive points that influenced the selection. I perceived these points as strengths and more critical than trying to find a site which matched perfectly all four criteria.
Criteria for Selection of Focal Students

Mrs. Boyd and I selected a group of seven focal students in order to take an in-depth and over time look at the nature of individual students' literacy learning, and her instructional focus and decision-making when interacting with them. The selection process involved ongoing conversations with Mrs. Boyd in order to clarify our criteria and brainstorm possible students. As described earlier, maximum variation sampling (Patton, 1990) was used in the selection of focal students in order to examine variations in classroom experiences. The criteria used in the selection process included (1) a group of students representing diverse literacy backgrounds and levels of ability (as defined by formal and informal classroom assessments); (2) a group of students representing diverse ways of being literate (i.e., different ways of using language to engage in classroom activities and interactions); (3) students representing different ethnic backgrounds; (4) good informants; (4) students who raised new questions to both researcher and teacher, and could help us better understand and learn about literacy learning and teaching. Although gender was taken into account, it was not part of the main criteria in this selection. The students’ age was not an issue considered in the selection process.

The selection process took place during the first month of school. It involved conversations with the teacher starting in the first week of school until the end of the third week. Mrs. Boyd offered many suggestions of families, who she thought would be interested in participating in the study, and open to homevisits. Initially, I had planned on focusing on four students to make the data collection manageable. It was difficult to
select few students, when all students had unique experiences and ways of participating in
the classroom.

We defined the names of six focal students (Kiera, Juanita, Alice, Bobby, Luana
and Derek) \(^3\) at the end of the third week of school. Kiera and Juanita were close friends,
and engaged in a variety of reading and writing activities together. However, they had
very different backgrounds, and reading and writing ability levels. Juanita had been
referred to the school’s Reading Recovery program, and Kiera was the most advanced
reader in the classroom. Juanita enjoyed talking and telling stories about things she liked
to do. In the beginning of the year, Kiera was more reserved and over the year, she
became more comfortable talking with different people and engaging in interactions with
different classmates. Alice was a quiet child, who often sat in the back during meeting
time. Her quiet ways made her easy to miss during classroom activities. She often seemed
not interested and easily distracted during classroom activities, although she also could
suddenly pay close attention to Mrs. Boyd. As she became more comfortable with me,
Alice enjoyed telling me stories about her home experiences. Her reading and writing
ability levels were in the lowest in the classroom. In the beginning of the school year, due
to space limitations, she was not selected to either the school’s Reading Recovery
program or Early Reading Initiative programs. Luana’s reading and writing testing scores
were also among the lowest in the classroom. She had been selected for the school’s
Reading Recovery program. Luana enjoyed reading and writing activities although she
was often frustrated for not knowing how to read and write words correctly. Luana

\(^3\) See table 4.1 in chapter 4 for information on the students’ age and ethnicity.
enjoyed socializing and playing with different classmates. Singing was an important part of her play. Juanita, Alice and Luana’s family struggled financially. Juanita lived with her grandmother and older sister. Alice lived with her mother, two siblings and grandmother. Luana lived with her mother at her older cousin and uncle’s house.

Bobby spent a lot of time adding details and new colors to his drawings. Developing friendship was also an important concern for Bobby. His reading and writing ability levels were average within his classroom group. Derek also enjoyed arts and drawing, as well as playing with the math tubs. He was an articulate child, who enjoyed telling detailed stories about his home experiences, and explaining how things work (e.g., how a handmade flashlight is put together). Derek had been referred to the school’s Early Reading Initiative program. Reading and writing were not interesting activities for both Bobby and Derek. Their families had lower middle incomes, and both parents worked. Bobby had two younger siblings, and Derek had a younger brother.

In the middle of October, Juanita transferred to another school in the district. She had special permission to attend Highwood, and when her family had transportation problems, she had to start using the district’s transportation and go to a different school within her attendance area. After Juanita moved, we decided to officially select Laurie as a focal student. We had originally thought of having Laurie as a focal student. Since the beginning of the year, I had had many interactions with Laurie, who often initiated conversations and asked me to work with her. Laurie was very interested in writing, reading and drawing activities at school and at home. Her reading and writing ability levels were among the highest in the classroom.
Gaining Entry and Developing Rapport

In our first meeting, Julie Boyd and I talked about her early schedule prior to the beginning of the school year, and we defined the research schedule for this period and for the first days of school. After our meeting, Mrs. Boyd contacted her principal and the District’s central office to notify of her interest in participating in the research project. She received their oral permission, and was informed of the paperwork required by the district. At the same time, I applied and acquired written consent from my university’s Human Subjects Review Committee, and sent the application materials and copy of my proposal to the district’s central office.

A week before school started, I spent one full day with Mrs. Boyd helping her begin to set up the classroom. During this day, she gave me a tour of the school and its attendance area, and shared information about the families and community (as described in more detail in chapter 4). I also had the opportunity to meet the principal, school’s staff development person and some of the teachers. I briefly described the purpose of my research to the principal, who asked me a few questions for clarification and made some comments about her own process of working on a dissertation. I gave copies of my proposal to Mrs. Boyd and her principal.

In the week school started, I went to the school’s Open House on Monday, and spent part of the teacher working day, on Tuesday, helping Mrs. Boyd get ready for the school’s early assessment schedule. During the school’s open house, I had the

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4 The students started school in a staggered scheduled; that is, the school divided each classroom in three groups for each of the first three days of school (Wednesday, Thursday and Friday - August 26, 27 and 28) in order to speed the completion of early assessment requirements. Mrs. Boyd’s classroom first day as a whole group was on the following Monday (August 31).
opportunity to meet some of the families and their children. Mrs. Boyd introduced me individually to some of the families, and she commented that I would be developing a research in her classroom over the year.

Mrs. Boyd and I decided to send the consent form and an introductory letter describing my research affiliation, the nature of the research and the research timeline to the students’ families in the second week of school (see copy in Appendix B). We took into account the large amount of paperwork (e.g., the school’s information folder, Parent and Teacher Association – PTA letters, and Mrs. Boyd’s curriculum notes, monthly homework calendar and parent survey) that was sent home in the first days of school. All families, except for one, granted permission for their children to participate in the study (later in the school year, the family of a new student also did not sign the consent form).

Mrs. Boyd’s fourteen years as a teacher at Highwood, her history with some of the families (she had taught the siblings of four students), and the community’s respect for her work facilitated my process of receiving permission and developing rapport with the students’ families. In particular, the families of four focal students, who we visited together in November and I met individually in June.

In the first month of school, Mrs. Boyd organized a parent information night in which she explained more about the first grade program’s curriculum and expectations. In her meeting notice, Mrs. Boyd informed families that I would be available to answer questions about my study. In this meeting, I had the opportunity to talk with the families as a group about the nature of my research, and to answer questions. Over the school year, I also had opportunity to interact with different families during school and classroom
activities (e.g., Literacy night or Snowball Express, one fieldtrip, parent conferences, student-led conferences, K.I.S.S. tea day\(^5\), and Field day). As I explain later in this chapter and in chapter 4, I had more contact with the families of five focal students with whom I met in school and classroom activities, and during homevisits.

My relationship with Mrs. Boyd and the nature of our collaboration evolved over the school year. Critical for the development of rapport and building trust with Mrs. Boyd, the students and families was the consistency and regularity of our meetings and my yearlong involvement in the classroom and special activities. Developing rapport, establishing trust and maintaining it over the school year were critical to my process of learning and gaining a sense of their perspectives (Erickson, 1986).

By being involved in a number of the daily activities, school activities, special events and getting to know some of the families, I become a part of the classroom community. Although I spent more time with focal students, I also interacted with other students on a regular basis (e.g., listening to their new stories and interests, listening to them read books, helping on work assignments, etc.). The equipment used in the data collection process, such as videocamera and tape recorders, were in the classroom since the first day of school. In general, classroom members became used to and seemed comfortable with the equipment used for data collection.

**The Teacher as Co-Researcher: The Nature of the Collaboration**

An important aspect of this study was the development of a “collaborative venture” (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988) with the teacher. Julie Boyd’s interest, time

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\(^5\) Kids Invite Someone Special (K.I.S.S.) tea day.
commitment, and active involvement in the data collection process supported the development of this research project. She viewed the research project as an opportunity for professional development and reflection on her teaching. Our collaborative relationship involved making joint decisions about data collection methods (e.g., use of research equipment, informal interviews with families and students); developing a classroom book project (in order to gather information about the students’ understandings of classroom routines); visiting four families together in November; ongoing documentation of focal students’ progress and collection of their classroom artifacts.

At the same time, our weekly or bi-weekly meetings allowed better understanding and documentation of her “insider” point of view. In fact, Mrs. Boyd’s involvement and commitment to the research project allowed a close and ongoing access to her decision-making process and actions; her perspective on how opportunities for literacy learning and teaching were constructed in the classroom; and her perspective on the meanings attributed to literacy in the classroom, school, district, and families and community. This close and yearlong access to Mrs. Boyd’s decision-making and actions allowed me to document and map out her process of planning, organizing and carrying on classroom routines and activities, and moving through and attending to contexts outside the classroom (i.e., the district, school and family and community). Mrs. Boyd’s work and responsibilities as a teacher were of primary focus in this study due to her interest and the access she provided throughout the school year.

Through constant member checking, our collaborative relationship also supported the process of data analysis and understanding of the complex nature of classroom life,
and reduced the risk of misrepresentation, bias and overgeneralizations. The nature of our collaborative relationship and the research project provided new opportunities (in systematic ways) for reflection and understanding of the nature of literacy learning and teaching. At the end of the school year, Mrs. Boyd shared that being involved in the study had been a positive experience that supported her teaching.

The Roles of the Researcher

Throughout the research process, my participation in the classroom involved "varying degrees of 'participantness'" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p.60). It ranged "across a continuum from mostly observation to mostly participation" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.40). Defining my role in the classroom was an "ongoing process," which involved repeatedly negotiation over the school year (Graue & Walsh, 1998). This negotiation took into account what would provide the most meaningful data about the nature of literacy learning and teaching in the classroom, and issues of reciprocity and ethics.

This negotiation involved conflicts and tensions in terms of which degree of participation to chose. For example, in the first days of school, I took an active role in helping Julie Boyd assess her students' reading and writing abilities with a standardized instrument (The Observation Survey, Clay, 1993b). It was a conflicting decision since I did not want the students to associate me as another teacher, and with the context of assessment. On the other hand, it gave me the opportunity to closely observe how
students responded to the test, and help Mrs. Boyd meet assessment requirements with a large number of students.

As I explain later in this chapter, during classroom activities I took a “reactive entry strategy” (Corsaro, 1985). I responded to the teacher and students’ requests or questions but was careful not to interfere in classroom daily routines and practices. I developed a relationship with students where I was perceived an “out-of-the ordinary” adult (Tammivaara & Enright, 1986, p.229). In other words, the students knew that for the most part, I would not interfere on their play or react the same as Mrs. Boyd when they were “off task.” I could help when needed and answer their questions although Mrs. Boyd was better informed of their schedule and assignments’ goals. Finally, they knew that I was more available as an audience to their work and stories than Mrs. Boyd, who was responsible for orchestrating and carrying on the daily classroom routines and activities.

Issues of reciprocity and ethics were constantly taken into account when defining my roles and degree of participation in the classroom.

**Issues of Reciprocity and Ethics**

This study involved a year-long, intensive contact and participation in Julie Boyd’s classroom. It required Mrs. Boyd to make adjustments to my presence and giving her time to be interviewed, clarify classroom observations, and/or collaborate in the data collection and analysis process. As a result, meeting “the demands of reciprocity” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p.60) was a constant concern throughout the study, which
involved making adjustments in my research schedule. For example, in many occasions, I supported Mrs. Boyd when trying to attend students individually (considering her large number of students). I was also available to do small chores in the classroom when needed in order to help Mrs. Boyd prepare for daily activities.

As a part of the classroom community, I felt responsible for the relationships I developed with the teacher, students and their families. Many times my responsibilities as a member of the classroom community were in conflict with my researcher’s goals and schedule. For example, although my individual focus was on a small group of students, I ended up spending more time in the classroom or adjusting my observation schedule in order to be able to respond and interact with other students. I tried to respond to students, who requested my attention (e.g. for reading or listening to their stories and experiences), asked questions or needed help. In addition, during classroom activities involving families, I supported Mrs. Boyd’s opportunities to interact with families and students. For example, during school events such as the parent informational night and the student-led conferences, I volunteered to baby-sit for two families so that they could fully participate in these events. My participation in these events was a form of retribution to the teacher and families’ generous contribution to the study.

Ethical issues took part all along the research process particularly in relation to the nature of the collaboration among the researcher and teacher, the role of the researcher in the classroom, and the confidentiality of some of the information gathered. First, as part of our collaborative relationship, I shared and brainstormed my analysis and drafts of my writings with Mrs. Boyd, and was available to answer her questions. Mrs. Boyd took an
active role in the data collection process, and the data analysis was informed by constant
member checking. Second, as an expert in the area of early literacy, I felt responsible for
supporting Mrs. Boyd work with individual students (particularly in the beginning of the
school year) taking into account the large number of students with low reading and
writing ability levels. Third, by being constantly present in the school and classroom, I
was often present or in close distance to private conversations. The confidentiality of
these conversations, and of parts of my conversations with the teacher, students and
families were taken into account in the analysis and writing of this dissertation.

Ongoing Reflexivity

My presence in the field, my personal biography, cultural background, my
theoretical and methodological orientation, my reaction to the classroom, school and
teacher’s actions and words, and my interpretations of their words and actions all
influenced the research process. For instance, being from a different country (i.e., Brazil),
having English as my second language, and having gone through a different educational
system brought more novelty to my research experience, as well as to the research
participants. My background and native language also became conversation topics in my
interactions with the students, families and teacher. During the study, the teacher was my
interpreter not only of what was occurring in the classroom and school but also of
unfamiliar language and customs.
At the same time, the teacher and students' reactions to and understanding of my words and actions also played a critical role in the research process. As Rossman and Rallis (1998) put it,

The personal biography of the researcher and the roles she takes influence the research – both the sense she makes of the setting and how people she studies make sense of her. (p.38)

Ongoing reflexivity involved taking into account and reflecting on the influence of my presence and the roles I took in the classroom. It involved taking into account that the researcher can not “escape the social world in order to study it” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p.15). In other words, “Observation not only disturbs and shapes but it is also shaped by what is observed” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.98). Further, the context of the relationship built between the researcher and research participants is also situated historically, socially, and culturally (Graue & Walsh, 1998).

Data Collection Process

This study took an interpretive approach and ethnographic perspective to investigate the nature of opportunities for literacy learning and teaching in a first grade classroom over a period of one school year. Specific ethnographic tools were used for data collection such as participant observation, field notes, audiotaping, videotaping, photographs, collection of artifacts and documents, and informal interviews and ongoing conversations with the teacher, students and families (including homevisits). The data collection process involved four phases: (1) data collected prior to the school year; (2) fall, (3) winter; and (4) spring. In this section, I first introduce and describe the techniques

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used for data collected. Then, I describe the time period, focus, and data sources of each
data collection phase.

**Ethnographic Tools used for Data Collection**

This year-long ethnography involved the collection of multiple sources of data
through participant observation in classroom and school activities, field notes,
audiotaping, videotaping, collection of artifacts and documents, classroom maps,
photographs, and informal interviews with the teacher, students and families.

**Participant Observation**

Participant observation “characterizes most ethnographic research and is crucial to
effective fieldwork” (Fetterman, 1998, p.34). As explained by Goodwin and Goodwin
(1996),

*Participant observation* as data-collection strategy is rooted in ethnography ... By
taking part in the activities of the individuals being studied, the researcher learns
of their perceptions of reality – termed “constructed realities” – as expressed by
their actions and in their thoughts, beliefs, and feelings [italics in the original].
(pp.131-132)

On the other hand, direct participation and personal knowledge were resources that
supported the process of understanding and interpreting the nature of literacy practices in
Mrs. Boyd’s classroom (Patton, 1990). In this study, participant observation also set the
stage for other techniques used for data collection (e.g., informal interviews) in that it
allowed an initial, and later more refined, understanding of the life in the classroom.
As previously mentioned, my involvement in classroom and school activities involved various levels of participation during fieldwork. Mostly, I took a "reactive entry strategy" in that my actions in the classroom were "peripheral" to the daily routines (Corsaro, 1985). In other words, I responded to the teacher and students' questions, helped when needed, and was careful not to interfere in the flow of classroom routines and practices. My primary purpose was to observe and document classroom activities involving literacy learning and teaching, and classroom members' actions and patterns of interactions, and perspectives. To some extent, I also engaged in classroom activities. By being a constant presence in the classroom and becoming part of the classroom community, my experiences alternated "between an insider and outsider perspective, and having both simultaneously" (Spradley, 1980, p.57).

During classroom observations of whole group events located in the meeting area, I sat behind all the students either on the floor or a small chair (see figure 4.11 or 4.12 for a map of the classroom, p.189 and 190). I quietly observed, took written field notes and managed research equipment (i.e., changed tapes in the audiotape and videotape as needed) during whole group activities, as well as formal assessments and reading groups. On the other hand, in classroom observations of quiet work choice time or quiet work time, I observed and participated at various levels. My interactions with the students included (1) responding to students' questions and helping them when asked; (2) being an audience to their stories, work (e.g., writings, drawings, art projects, etc.), and special possessions (e.g., books, toys, new clothes, new bags, cards, etc.); (3) listening to them read when asked; and (4) asking questions about their work and experiences at school and
home, and asking them to read to me (primarily the focal students). With the teacher, my interactions involved short conversations and reflections on the classroom daily activities and students’ participation, clarifying questions, and helping when needed. When possible, during these interactions, I used a tape recorder and/or a videocamera. I mainly observed school activities although I also interacted with students, families, and other school members.

The research questions and theoretical framework guided my classroom observations. My classroom observations changed and became more focused throughout the study. The focus of my observations was impacted and guided by methodological decisions made after revision and analysis of field notes. Ongoing analysis influenced the selection of classroom activities, participants and areas to focus on; that is, identifying “who or what to observe, when, and for how long” (Creswell, 1998, p.125). These observations allowed a general understanding of the range of opportunities for literacy learning and teaching available in the classroom.

Field Notes

Systematic classroom observations were accompanied by detailed field notes. Hand-written notes were taken simultaneously and/or after my classroom observations. In the case of school activities and special events (e.g., field trip, parent conferences, etc.), I wrote field notes immediately after in a notebook or typed them directly in the computer. There were over 400 pages of hand-written notes.
Field notes followed a “free-association form” (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996) in that I did not have a structured format and chose to write as much as possible about classroom members’ actions, interactions and use of classroom space and materials. I adopted recording conventions in order to quickly identify different types of information in the field notes while keeping varying types of data in the specific context in which they occurred (Corsaro, 1985). Parallel to my observation notes, I used the following conventions: PN (personal notes), MN (methodological notes), and TN (theoretical notes) to identify different content (Corsaro, 1985; Richardson, 1994). Personal notes included my feelings about the research project and process, and my ongoing process of developing relationships with classroom members. My methodological notes consisted of messages and reflections focused on the process and methods being used to collect data. Theoretical notes involved “hunches, hypotheses, [interpretations] … critiques” of what I was seeing, thinking and doing (Richardson, p.526).

As recording conventions, I also used Q (questions) for aspects of the classroom activities and members participation that I needed to clarify particularly with the teacher. Additionally, I identified the equipment being used during classroom observations parallel to my written notes. For example, “green tape and camera on” meant that one of the tape recorders (identified with a green sticker) and the videocamera were both on at the same time.

Like my classroom observations, my field notes also became more focused as the research progressed. As explained by Goodwin and Goodwin,
Initially, they [the observation and notes] are more general, descriptive and broad in scope; as time goes by, they become increasingly focused, narrow, and deep. (p.133)

Adopted recording conventions, particularly PN, MN, TN and Q, as well as the process of reviewing field notes supported methodological decisions (i.e., focused the scope of classroom observations and field notes.) and the ongoing analysis process. Field notes were later used to reconstruct the context of specific classroom activities.

Hand-written notes were later typed in a Microsoft word program, and re-organized following broad categories (as described in the data analysis section). Classroom maps, photographs, audiotapes and documents (including classroom artifacts) were used to enhance my field notes and “overall richness of the descriptive data” (Goodwin & Goodwin, p1996, p.133). Classroom maps were used to identify classroom members’ location during specific classroom activities. During quiet work time and/or quiet work choice time, I used a printed copy of a classroom map in which I wrote the names of classroom members. I used this printed copy once or twice a day, primarily during fall and winter data collection periods. During all whole group activities observed in the meeting area, I drafted a simple map of the students and the teacher’s location in my field notes.

Audiotapes

As previously mentioned, audiotapes were used to add to my field notes. I used four small tape recorders to record classroom interactions. One tape recorder (or red
sticker recorder) was mainly used in the meeting area. The second tape recorder (or green sticker recorder) was used to record Mrs. Boyd's one-on-one interactions primarily with focal students. She also monitored this tape recorder. The third tape recorder (or blue sticker recorder) was used to record the students' interactions during quiet work time or quiet work choice time as well as their interactions with me. The fourth tape recorder (or yellow sticker recorder) was used for my informal interviews with the teacher. When needed, I also used the red and green sticker tape recorders to document the students' interactions.

Having four tape recorders helped separate the content of the audiotapes, and facilitated finding specific content later during the analysis process. Each audiotape was identified with the same color sticker of its tape recorder. Audiotapes used during informal interviews with families were identified with a dark blue sticker. The audiotapes were all dated and numbered. The tape coding system facilitated the process of data organization. Based on analysis of field notes, selected audiotapes were first catalogued and partially transcribed. Later in the analysis process, selected tapes were fully transcribed, and transcript conventions were adapted from Rowe (1994). The adopted transcription conventions are described in Appendix A.

To some extent, the students were always aware of the presence of tape recorders, particularly during quiet work time and quiet work choice time. During these activities, I often left one tape recorder on a table where a group of students was working. The students often included the tape recorders in their conversations and used it to extend their play (e.g., talk about each other to the tape recorder as way of teasing and playing,
and singing and making playful noises), and/or to send messages to me. On the other hand, because of the small size of the tape recorders, it was easy to move them around (especially the blue tape recorder) and find a space to leave them on the students’ table or desk.

Videotapes

One videocamera was also used to record daily classroom activities and special events (e.g., the school’s Literacy night, student-led conferences, and K.I.S.S. tea day). The videocamera was used in the classroom since the first day of school. It was located next to the meeting area on a rolling cart (see figure 4.11 and 4.12, p.189 and 190). It was always on during all classroom observations. Mrs. Boyd was comfortable with it throughout the study. In general, the students became used to the videocamera, and it did not seem to affect their interactions. Occasionally, students waved and made faces to the camera as I changed tapes or the angle of the camera lenses.

For this dissertation, the data analyzed did not include analysis of videotapes. I focused my analysis primarily on field notes and audiotapes of classroom observations and informal interviews. Videotaping was used to enhance classroom observations and field notes, and as verification to support the analysis of field notes and audiotapes. I also used classroom maps, photographs, and documents and artifacts to enhance the description of the data.
Photographs

Photographs were used to document classroom activities and interactions, and the space and materials available throughout the school year. Early in the school year, they were also used as basis for an informal interview with the focal students, and in the development of a classroom book project.

In October, I used a series of classroom photographs as “projective techniques” (Fetterman, 1998). My goal was to illicit information and document the students’ perspectives on the meanings and purposes of classroom activities and literacy practices. I showed the photographs to the focal students, and asked them to talk about them. Overall, this activity was not successful, and the students’ responses were short and did not show interest in talking about the photographs within the format of my questions. As I explain later in the informal interview section, as the year progressed, I developed other ways to approach and ask questions from the students.

The teacher and I planned and organized the classroom book project, and the teacher carried it out. The purposes of this project were to document the students’ understanding of classroom routines, and to develop a classroom book. In small groups of two or three students, the teacher and the students brainstormed and wrote about selected photographs of classroom routines. From this project, the teacher organized two versions of a classroom book. The big version was kept in the classroom as an alternative option for silent reading time. Two copies of a small version were available for students to take home and share with their families.
Collection of Documents and Artifacts

Documents provide both historical and contextual dimensions to your observations and interviews. They enrich what you see and hear by supporting, expanding, and challenging your portrayals and perceptions. Your understanding of the phenomenon in question grows as you make use of the documents and artifacts that are a part of people’s lives. (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 54)

Classroom, school, home, district and state documents or artifacts were used to understand the nature of classroom opportunities for literacy learning and teaching. They were also used to confirm findings. For example, state documents were used to understand and confirm the history of the district’s course of study and assessment programs. School documents such as the monthly newsletter, staff notes, memorandums and PTA letters were used to extend and enrich my classroom observations and field notes. The students’ personal books, cards and other possessions provided a broader picture of their interests, and their involvement in literacy practices outside the classroom and school contexts. Classroom documents and artifacts such as the teacher’s lesson plans, classroom handouts, weekly letters to parents, monthly homework calendar and curriculum notes enhanced the richness of my field notes and classroom observations. Classroom writings and drawings including the students’ writings and drawings, their portfolios, and writings produced by the teacher and students were also important sources of information in the data analysis process.

Through documents and artifacts, I sought “information about the behaviors, experiences, beliefs, knowledge, values, and perceptions” of classroom members in order to more fully describe and understand the nature of classroom life (Goodwin & Goodwin,
They were stable and rich sources of information in that they accurately reflected the participants’ beliefs and knowledge, and they were “contextually relevant and grounded in the contexts” they represented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.277).

The teacher and I also kept a journal writing initially in a notebook form and as the study progressed through email communication. In these writings, the teacher answered to questions on her curriculum, expectations and process of implementation. She also wrote reflections on her ongoing decisions and perceptions of the students’ classroom involvement and progress.

Informal Interviews

In addition to classroom observations and field notes, informal interviews were a major source of the data collected and analyzed in this study. Informal interviews were used to gather information and discover classroom members’ (and a group of four families) perceptions, expectations, experiences, background, interests and shared values.

In general, the informal interviews involved a mixture of casual conversation and embedded questions with a “specific but implicit research agenda” (Fettersman, 1998, p.38). These questions were based on field notes and classroom observations as well as the research questions, although in some cases, they emerged from the conversation. Informal interviews with the teacher, students and families also followed a general interview guide or a sequence of guiding open-ended questions. As Goodwin and Goodwin (1996) explains,

Unstructured or informal interviews are widely used for data gathering in qualitative research studies. Within this interview category, variations can occur
in the “naturalness” of the questions and question-asking behaviors. Some researchers will prepare a general interview guide that outlines the topics for questioning, so as to ensure that important areas are covered and that there is some uniformity from one interview to another. In other situations, particularly ethnographic studies, the interview is like an informal conversation and is very open-ended. (p.135)

The development of a non-threatening and comfortable atmosphere for the informal interviews was influenced by my process of establishing and maintaining a healthy rapport with classroom members and families. This process also involved monitoring my own assumptions and participation in the conversation in order to reinforced my “genuine desire to learn the ‘truth’ of the informants’ world” as they defined it (Tammivaara & Enright, 1986, p.225). The regularity of my meetings with the Mrs. Boyd supported the development of a positive and comfortable rapport and relationship. In addition, Mrs. Boyd’s interest and involvement in the research process facilitated the development of informal interviews embedded in our ongoing conversations. Journal writing (fall) and email communication (winter and spring) was also used as a space for continuing our conversations and asking new questions.

As I explain below, the process of interviewing and developing ongoing conversations with the students was more difficult than I first expected. On the other hand, homevisits and informal interviews with the focal students’ families provided the opportunity to learn about the students and observe them in a different context and outside school.
Interviewing Students. Throughout the study, I learned new ways to interact with the students in order to confirm and gather information about their perspectives on classroom practices and their literacy experiences. I found that the students were interested in telling me stories about new events in their lives or new possessions but not interested in responding to formal questions related to their classroom reading and writing experiences. For example, early in the school year, when I asked Derek about his handmade flashlight, he went into details to explain how his father put it together. On the other hand, when I asked him about things that happened on a day I was absent as well as the meaning of specific classroom areas and routines, he seemed disinterested and cut the conversation short.

The limitations of my attempts to elicit information from the students reflected my difficulties in communicating adequately with them. My early attempts to ask questions were probably interpreted as school-type questions or question with a known answer, which normally occur during a lesson or exam. On the other hand, in ethnographic research,

"in general, the less that the ethnographer interferes in the activity of children before, during, and after the interview, the better.... It is therefore important that the adult ethnographer attempt to adjust to the discourse patterns presently being used by the child informants being interviewed rather than vice versa" (Tammivaara and Enright, 1986, p.230).

As the year progressed, I tried to engage in concrete and meaningful opportunities for interaction and conversation with the students. Mostly, I listened to their interactions and
acted as an audience to their stories. My questions were generally embedded in and followed the topic of their stories.

**Homevisits and Interviewing Families.** Informal interviews with the families occurred during homevisits or meetings at school in November and June. The purposes of these homevisits were (1) to gather additional information about the students' home and community experiences and literacy practices; (2) to have an opportunity to observe the focal students in a different context outside school; (3) to learn about their families' experiences, expectations and goals for the school year; and (4) to learn about their reflections about the school year, their children's learning experiences, and their future goals. Mrs. Boyd and I visited four families together in November. In June, I visited two families and met with two mothers (one I met at school, and the other I met for lunch). In addition, during the school year, I had opportunities to develop casual conversations with these families during school and classroom special activities (e.g., Open House, parent informational night, parent conferences, the first field trip, the Literacy night or Snowball Express, student-led conferences, K.I.S.S. tea day, and field day), and in same cases during school dismissal.

Before the first homevisit, Mrs. Boyd and I brainstormed ways of approaching the families. Our goal was to make them to feel that we visited them in order to learn about their children, and not to judge or give the idea that there were right or wrong answers to our questions. Overall, we tried to be flexible with the flow of our conversation, and took turns asking questions. After the homevisits, two of the families shared that they were
apprehensive before the visits but they felt comfortable and enjoyed the experience. They saw as beneficial for the children in that they had the opportunity to show us their special interests and abilities.

In November, Mrs. Boyd and I contacted the families of six focal students through a letter to ask permission for a home visit and check their available times (see copy in Appendix C). These families had already signed permission forms sent home in the beginning of the school year. Mrs. Boyd and I visited the families of four focal students (Kiera, Laurie, Bobby and Derek. It is relevant to note that the teacher's history with two of the families (she had taught other children in these families), and respect within the community facilitated our process of gaining entry with these four families. Originally, we had planned to visit seven families. One of the focal students, Juanita, moved in October, and we did not receive response to our letter and second copy from two families (Luana's and Alice's families). We decided to wait and try again after the Christmas break. Alice's and Luana's families did not respond to letters sent in late January. In the beginning of February, we had the opportunity to talk with Luana's family during the student-led conference, when they agreed with the home visit. However, in the middle of February, both Alice's and Luana's families moved to different cities and new schools.

In the first month of school, I had the opportunity to visit Luana's family with the school's Reading Recovery teacher, who had contacted them through a phone call. The school's Reading Recovery program was funded by Title I funds, which required home visits in the beginning of the school year to explain the program goals and expectations. Although the purpose of this visit was different than the other home visits, I
was able to observe Luana in her home context, and learn about her prior experiences and her family's goals and concerns. In this home visit, I acted primarily as an observer and did not ask questions.

The second informal interview with Laurie, Kiera, Derek and Bobby's families occurred at the end of the school year. I scheduled our meetings or home visits when they came to the school's K.I.S.S. tea day. This informal interview followed a list of guiding questions, which focused primarily on the families' evaluation of their children's literacy learning experience over the school year (see copy in Appendix D). It also aimed at member checking and confirming findings found in the analysis of prior data.

Phases of Data Collection

The data collection was organized in four phases over a period of one school year. As shown in figure 3.2, each phase involved a particular focus, data sources, and techniques (or ethnographic tools) for data collection.

The first phase involved meetings with the teacher before the beginning of the school year. The purposes of these meetings were: (a) to develop rapport and begin a collaborative relationship with the teacher; (b) to document Mrs. Boyd's curriculum goals and expectations for the year; and (c) to document Mrs. Boyd's decision-making process as she set up her classroom and planned for the first weeks of school (including the early assessment). During this phase, Mrs. Boyd and I also discussed and planned the use of data collection tools (e.g., the location of one videocamera and three tape recorders in the classroom, journal writing, collection of children's artifacts, informal interviews with the
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Phases &amp; Time Period</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Techniques</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 1</strong>&lt;br&gt;Prior to the School Year&lt;br&gt;August&lt;br&gt;Total days = 3&lt;br&gt;Total hours = 11</td>
<td>Gaining entry and developing rapport; Becoming familiar with the setting and community; Documenting the teacher's goals and expectations for the year, process of setting up the classroom, planning for the first weeks of school and organizing materials for early assessment.</td>
<td>Classroom and school activities&lt;br&gt;Neighborhood tour&lt;br&gt;Open House</td>
<td>Participant observation&lt;br&gt;Field notes&lt;br&gt;Informal interviews with the teacher&lt;br&gt;Collection of written documents&lt;br&gt;Audiotape, videotape and photographs.</td>
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<td><strong>Phase 2</strong>&lt;br&gt;Fall&lt;br&gt;August – December&lt;br&gt;Total days = 40&lt;br&gt;Total hours = 236</td>
<td>Development of social and literacy practices; Opportunities for literacy learning and teaching at the individual and collective levels; and Teaching decision-making processes. Triangulation of multiple data sources Member checking</td>
<td>Classroom and school activities&lt;br&gt;Weekly meetings with the teacher, journal writing, and email communication&lt;br&gt;Parent informational night&lt;br&gt;Classroom book project&lt;br&gt;Homevisits&lt;br&gt;Parent conferences (focal students)&lt;br&gt;First field trip</td>
<td>Participant observation&lt;br&gt;Field notes and classroom maps&lt;br&gt;Informal interviews with the teacher, focal students and four families&lt;br&gt;Collection of written documents&lt;br&gt;Audiotape, videotape and photographs.</td>
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<td><strong>Phase 3</strong>&lt;br&gt;Winter&lt;br&gt;January – March&lt;br&gt;Total days = 13&lt;br&gt;Total hours = 69</td>
<td>Literacy and social practices; Opportunities for literacy learning and teaching at the individual and collective levels; and Teaching decision-making processes. Triangulation of multiple data sources Member checking</td>
<td>Classroom and school activities&lt;br&gt;Weekly meetings with the teacher and email communication&lt;br&gt;Family Literacy Night&lt;br&gt;Student-led conferences</td>
<td>Participant observation&lt;br&gt;Field notes and classroom maps&lt;br&gt;Informal interviews with the teacher and focal students&lt;br&gt;Collection of written documents&lt;br&gt;Audiotape, videotape and photographs.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 4</strong>&lt;br&gt;Spring&lt;br&gt;March – June&lt;br&gt;Total days = 7&lt;br&gt;Total hours = 53</td>
<td>Literacy and social practices; Opportunities for literacy learning and teaching at the individual and collective levels; Teaching decision-making processes; and end of the year closure. Triangulation of multiple data sources Member checking</td>
<td>Classroom and school activities&lt;br&gt;Bi-weekly meetings with the teacher and email communication&lt;br&gt;K.I.S.S. tea day&lt;br&gt;Field day&lt;br&gt;Homevisits</td>
<td>Participant observation&lt;br&gt;Field notes and classroom maps&lt;br&gt;Informal interviews with the teacher, focal students and four families&lt;br&gt;Collection of written documents&lt;br&gt;Audiotape, videotape and photographs.</td>
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Figure 3.2 Timeline of Data Collection Procedures
students, and weekly meetings between Mrs. Boyd and I). In the first phase, I spent one full day with Mrs. Boyd, when I helped her start to set up her classroom. Mrs. Boyd also gave me a neighborhood tour and I had the opportunity to meet other school staff. I also spent a half-day helping Mrs. Boyd with assessment materials, and participated at the school’s Open House.

In the second phase, data of classroom activities were collected everyday during the first four weeks of school (total of 17 days); three days per week in the fifth, sixth and seventh weeks (total of 9 days); and two days per week in the eighth and tenth weeks (total of 4 days). In addition, I continued to meet with Mrs. Boyd on a weekly basis, I observed the focal students’ parent conferences, and I participated in the classroom’s first field trip (total of 10 days). The first homevisits occurred during this phase. Luana’s homevisit occurred after a classroom observation day, Bobby’s homevisit occurred after a meeting with Mrs. Boyd, and other three homevisits (Laurie’s, Derek’s and Kiera’s) occurred after a parent-conference.

The focus of the second phase was to (a) document the development of social and literacy practices in the classroom; (b) document the development of opportunities for literacy learning and teaching at the individual and collective levels; and (c) document Mrs. Boyd’s ongoing decision-making processes. In other words, my purpose was to gather information and try to understand the ways in which classroom members (teacher and students) constructed and defined the literacy practices and classroom routines developed in the classroom’s everyday life (Floriani, 1997). Additionally, Mrs. Boyd and I made collaborative decisions about data collection procedures (e.g., selection of focal
students; planning and implementing the classroom book project; and planning and carrying on homevisits). Ongoing conversations with classroom members supported the data analysis, particularly triangulation of data sources and member checking.

The third phase of the data collection process occurred during the winter. Data were collected during classroom activities and meetings with Mrs. Boyd (total of 9 days), the student-led conferences (total of 1 day), and additional weekly meetings with Mrs. Boyd (total of 3 days). The focus of this phase was to continue to document (1) classroom literacy and social practices, (2) opportunities for literacy learning and teaching at the individual and collective levels, and (3) Mrs. Boyd’s ongoing decision-making process. As in phase two, during this phase, ongoing conversations with classroom members and the families of four focal students supported the data analysis, particularly triangulation of data sources and member checking.

The fourth phase involved data collected in the spring. In this phase, data were collected during classroom activities and meetings with Mrs. Boyd (total of 5 days) and an additional meeting with Mrs. Boyd (total of 1 day). Two homevisits occurred after meeting with Mrs. Boyd, one interview occurred during the school’s lunch break in the last day of school, and the last interview occurred on a different day. The focus of this phase was the same as the third phase’s focus. Additionally, in this phase, I documented the end of the year closure. That is, the last days of school and classroom members’ reflections: Mrs. Boyd’s reflections on the school year and goals for the next year, the students’ reflections on their learning in first grade (e.g., Mrs. Boyd asked them to write a letter to kindergarten describing first grade, which she brainstormed during meeting
time), and the families’ reflections on their children’s learning experiences and goals for next year. Triangulation of multiple data sources and member checking were also important focuses in this final phase.

**Data Analysis Process**

Even though the data collection section did not address data analysis procedures and timeline, it is important to state that ongoing analysis occurred throughout all phases of the data collection process. As explained by Zaharick and Green (1991),

Analysis of data begins immediately. The ethnographer refines the initial question as the unfolding patterns of everyday life become visible through observations and initial data analysis. (p.219-220)

Thus, the analysis process was not a separate stage in the research process, and it began “in the formulation and clarification of research problems, and … [influenced] the research design and data collection” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p.205). It was a situated, continuous and reflexive process that supported and informed data collection decisions in terms of why and when to collect data, and how and which data collection procedures to use.

The data analysis process was “iterative” (Fettenman, 1998; Graue & Walsh, 1998), and “not linear but rather cyclical and recursive, with findings from one analysis often leading to new questions and additional analysis” (Kantor, Miller & Fernie, 1992, p.188). In other words, it involved an ongoing “dialectical interaction between data collection and analysis” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p.205). This cyclical and
recursive process involved varied levels of analysis within a reflexive process of interpretation, or meaning making.

The process of interpretation illuminated "the multiple meanings of an event, object, experience, or text" (Denzin, p.504). It consisted of "both taking apart and putting together" the data corpus (particularly field notes and audiotapes of classroom observations and interviews, and documents and artifacts) through the use of multiple analytical strategies. These analytical strategies provided "meaning and insight to the words and acts of the participants in the study" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p.113), and the systematic analysis and refinement of emerging patterns and themes in the data.

**Analytical Strategies**

The following analytical strategies were used in an iterative and recursive analytical process in which the steps of the process informed one another in ways that were not sequential (Graue & Walsh, 1998). This analytical process was both inductive and deductive: Inductive in that through systematic analysis of the data corpus, I was able to identify emerging patterns; deductive in that emerging patterns led to theorized explanations (Graue & Walsh, 1998) or assertions (Erickson, 1986) and identification of themes, which were repeatedly reviewed through re-analysis and interpretation of data.

The analytical strategies used in the analysis process included: (1) careful reading of the data corpus; (2) identification of classroom literacy events and practices; (3) triangulation of multiple data sources; (4) identification of patterns and major themes
across the data; and (5) identification of “tracer units” (Green, Kantor & Fernie, 1992) or “interpretive elements” (Graue & Walsh, 1998).

**Careful Reading of the Data Corpus**

The process of carefully reading the data corpus allowed gaining familiarity with the data, and identification of broad categories, emerging patterns and themes, and triangulation of multiple data sources. In the process of gaining familiarity with the data,

[The] ... aim is to use the data to think with. One looks to see where any interesting patterns can be identified; whether anything stands out as surprising or puzzling; how the data relate to what one might have expected on the basis of common-sense knowledge, official accounts, or previous theory; and whether there are any apparent inconsistencies or contradictions among the views of different groups or individuals, or between people’s expressed beliefs or attitudes and what they do. Some such features and patterns may already have been noted in previous fieldnotes and analytic memos, perhaps even along with some ideas about how they might be explained. (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p.178)

This process involved: (1) reading and re-reading field notes and defining broad categories; (2) cataloguing and reviewing audiotapes; and (3) reading, examining and re-examining the content of documents and artifacts. Field notes were read, re-read and read again (Graue & Walsh, 1998). I used margin notes and highlighted (with bright liner) interesting patterns, broad categories, key events, and surprising actions and/or words. Hand-written notes were typed in a Microsoft word program, and re-organized following broad, and in many cases overlapping, categories. These categories included developing a sense of community (and social practices), literacy practices (and literacy curriculum), curriculum co-construction, and assessment. A hypertext program, QSR NUDIST 4.0,
was also used as an organizing tool, which later facilitated the search for key words and examples in coded documents or imported field notes.

The process of cataloguing and reviewing audiotapes also allowed gaining familiarity with the data. This process included partial transcription and archiving of selected audiotapes. Partial transcriptions were read and re-read, and margin notes and highlighting (with bright liner) were used to mark interesting patterns, broad categories, key events, and surprising actions and/or words. These audiotapes were selected based upon analysis of fieldnotes. Later in the analysis process selected parts of these audiotapes were fully transcribed.

The content of documents and artifacts was examined and re-examined based upon analysis of fieldnotes and emerging patterns and themes. They were important sources of information in the process of triangulation of multiple data sources. They allowed understanding of participants' actions and words, beliefs and knowledge, which were "contextually relevant and grounded in the contexts" they represented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.277).

Identification of Classroom Literacy Events and Practices

Upon entry in the field, I began to identify classroom literacy practices introduced by the teacher and jointly constructed by the teacher and students, or introduced and jointly constructed among students. I examined who, how, when and for what purposes classroom members engaged in and constructed opportunities for literacy learning and teaching in the classroom. This process involved the description and development of a
"cultural portrait", that is, an overview of the cultural scene by pulling together all aspects learned about the role of literacy in the life of the classroom, and examining its complexity and meanings (Creswell, 1998, p.61). In other words, it involved developing a "cultural grammar" of the literacy life in the classroom (Zaharlick and Green, 1991), a representational map of classroom literacy practices through the identification of "key or focal events" (Fetterman, 1998).

As Fetterman (1998) explains, key events "concretely convey a wealth of information. Some images are clear representations of social activity, whereas others provide a tremendous amount of embedded meaning. ... In many cases, the event is a metaphor for a way of life or specific social value. Key events provide a lens through which to view a culture" (pp.98-99). The process of identification of focal events clarified and refined the definition of literacy events as unit of analysis. As I describe in chapter 4, literacy events involved consistent patterns of organization defined by the characteristics of "interactional spaces" created (Green, Putney, Dixon, & Sena, 1998; Heras, 1993). In other words, they involved the participation of a particular number of classroom members following specific "interactional norms" (Cochran-Smith, 1984), in a particular physical space(s) in the classroom, in a particular time(s) of the day, and with specific materials and purpose.

The identification of a literacy event as unit of analysis reflects the theoretical and methodological frame that informed this study. By examining the event as the unit of analysis, it was possible to document how classroom members negotiated meanings and
how their participation changed along the process (Miller, 1998). As explained by Rogoff
(1995),

The use of "activity" or "event" as the unit of analysis – with active and dynamic
contributions from individuals, their social partners, and historical traditions and
materials and transformations - allows a reformulation of the relation between the
individual and the social and cultural environment in which each is inherently
involved in the others' definition. None exists separately. (p.140)

Thus, the analysis of literacy events allowed a lens through which to examine the nature
of literacy in the life of the classroom. Literacy events were socially and culturally
situated and constituted in the life of the classroom and involved interpersonal processes
in which students and teacher engaged in and co-constructed classroom opportunities for
literacy learning and teaching.

**Triangulation of Multiple Data Sources**

Triangulation of multiple data sources was ongoing throughout the data collection
and analysis processes. By using multiple procedures to collect data, it was possible to
"construct validity by examining data relating to the same construct from participant
observation, interviewing, and documents" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p.199). In
other words, the triangulation of multiple data sources contributed to "contextual
validation" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of possible meanings and patterned regularities. It
involved looking at relationships across multiple sources of data in order to compare and
relate what happens at different places and times in order to identify stable features and
patterned regularities.
Triangulation helped understand and put into perspective an action and thought within its context, as well as, examine patterns across the data corpus. In this study, triangulation included a “data collection-verification process” (Zaharlick & Green, 1991) and data analysis-verification process, which involved searching for confirming and disconfirming evidences (Erickson, 1986). Ongoing member checking, peer debriefing and conversations with my committee members supported this process.

Identification of Patterns and Major Themes

Analysis of any kind involves a way of thinking. It refers to the systematic examination of something to determine its parts, the relationship among parts, and their relationship to the whole. Analysis is a search for patterns. (Spradley, 1980, p.85)

A central part of the analysis process was the identification of patterns of thought and action occurring in classroom opportunities for literacy learning and teaching. The identification of patterns “are a form of ethnographic reliability” (Fetterman, 1998, p.96). The examination of patterns of thought and action involved examination of classroom members’ engagement in literacy events and practices over time. It involved a search for patterned regularities (Wolcott, 1994); stating “the relationship among features within and across contexts” (Zaharlick & Green, 1991, p.220); and drawing connections between the cultural group (and the role of literacy in the life of the classroom) and larger theoretical frameworks (Creswell, 1998). The examination of patterns led to the identification of major themes across the data. Three major themes were found: (1) the multi-layered nature of contexts in which literacy learning and teaching is embedded and
situated; (2) the interdependence of layers of context; and (3) the negotiated, co-
constructed and situated nature of classroom opportunities for literacy learning and
teaching. These themes will be described, displayed and interpreted in chapters 4 and 5.

Identification of Tracer Units

As an analytical strategy, I used the concept of “tracer units” as unit of analysis
(Green, Kantor & Fernie, 1992). Tracer units are “interpretive elements” or threads
woven “through events and images in the fieldwork that provide a coherent way of
thinking about the topic of interest of the research” (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p.163). The
identification of tracer units involved a process of weaving patterns and themes, and
bringing up the big picture of how they are interwoven together. At the same time, a
tracer unit is a focus, for example on an individual child’s experiences (Kantor, Elgas &
Fernie, 1993) or on the co-constitution of a piece of the curriculum, that allows to both
examine questions about the tracer unit itself (e.g., how does a particular focus child
engage in and construct opportunities for literacy learning?), and to illuminate the local
and the larger contexts that situate and constitute the tracer unit (e.g., how are the
opportunities for literacy learning of a particular focus child shaped and co-constituted by
the classroom context as well as by other contexts?). This concept and metaphor builds
on a medical tool, the radiographic dye, used for radiographic examination. Like the
radiographic dye injected into the human body for imaging, the medical doctor can see
the movement of the dye through the body and simultaneously examine the systems it
passes through.
I selected four tracer units to illuminate and examine the influence of multiple layers of contexts on the nature of literacy learning and teaching as it is co-constructed over time. The selection of tracer units was a principled decision, which took into account major aspects of classroom literacy practices: a group event, an individual story, a curriculum piece, and assessment. As discussed in chapter 5, the use of tracer units allowed me to examine opportunities for literacy learning and teaching across events and over time. The four tracer units included: (1) assessment practices; (2) a piece of the classroom's literacy curriculum called "songs and poems;" (3) a planned literacy event over time called "shared reading;" and (4) the story of the literacy learning of one student named Derek.

**Issues of Trustworthiness, Credibility and Transferability**

The standards for judging the value of interpretive and ethnographic research, which are qualitative approaches, differ from the criteria used in quantitative research. It is problematic and inappropriate to evaluate interpretive and ethnographic research with the lenses of traditional quantitative criteria (i.e., the notion of reliability, internal and external validity, replicability, generalizability and objectivity). For example, the notion of replicability becomes problematic considering "the dynamic nature of the social world and given that the researcher is not an instrument in the experimental sense" (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p.46). As explained by Merriam (1988), what is being studied in qualitative research "is assumed to be in flux, multifaceted, and highly contextual, because information gathered is a function of who gives it and how skilled the researcher is at
getting it, and because the emergent design of a qualitative … study precludes a priori controls, achieving reliability in the traditional sense is no only fanciful but impossible” (p.171, in Rossman & Rallis, p.46).

In addition, the conventional notion of objectivity (and standardization) is troublesome in interpretive and ethnographic research: Interpretive research assumes that “meaning is constructed by participants as they go about their everyday lives” (Rossman & Rallis, p.45). The premise of “truth value” based upon the notion of one single reality is “replaced by the assumption of multiple constructed realities” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.295). Rather than searching for Truth with a big T, the researcher searches for truth claims and interpretations, which area supported by triangulation of multiple data sources, member checks, and ongoing reflexivity. In ethnographic research, it is important to provide “thick descriptions” that have credibility to research participants.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer an alternative trustworthiness criteria for qualitative inquiry, which involve the notion of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Techniques such as prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, ongoing reflexivity and negative case analysis support the credibility of findings and interpretations. For example, prolonged engagement provides scope, and persistent observation provides depth (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As argued by Glesne and Peshkin (1992),

Time is a major factor in the acquisition of trustworthy data. Time at your research site, time spent interviewing, time to build sound relationships with respondents — all contribute to trustworthy data. (p.146)
In this study, yearlong prolonged engagement, persistent and focused classroom observations, triangulation of multiple data sources, member checking, peer debriefing and ongoing reflexivity were techniques used to establish credibility of findings and interpretations.

Transferability, generalizability or applicability in qualitative research is a matter of contributing to the understanding of similar cases. The goal is to bring to the attention of others a rich description and analysis of the complexity of one case, and hopefully "identify concepts not previously seen or fully appreciated" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.148). Thus, the establishment of transferability is dependent on thick description and the judgement of potential applicers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By providing rich descriptions, “Potential users can then determine for themselves if … [the] results will be of use [and insightful] in a new but similar setting” (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p.47).

Trustworthiness is also determined by the integrity of the research project in that theoretical and methodological orientations are consistent, and ethical standards have guided the study (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). This chapter started with a discussion of the relationship between theoretical and methodological frames used in the study in order to clarify how my research questions and conceptual framework guided the choice of methodology. Ethical and reciprocity issues were also discussed earlier in this chapter. These were important concerns that influenced my degrees of participation in the classroom, as well as that confidentiality issues were kept in mind during the data collection and analysis processes.
Ethnographic Studies: Preventing Overgeneralizations

Ethnographic studies of school practices are an alternative to the limitations of decontextualized comparisons as in laboratory analyses of cognitive performance that simplify and diminish the complexity of skills needed for participation in everyday life affairs. The use of ethnography in education also represents a way of supplementing other types of research. Ethnographic studies have provided a language to describe what counts as literacy for people from different sociocultural backgrounds as well as what counts as literacy in specific learning contexts and practices. As Heath (1982) reports,

Much traditional research in education has been quantitative, global, sociodemographic, and dependent on large-scale comparisons of many different schools, or it has been experimental, based on studies of selected groups operating in controlled settings ... Pieces of data about social groups, such as number of siblings, income of parents, time of mother-child interactions in pre-school experiences, have been correlated with the output of students expressed in test scores, subsequent income, and continued schooling ... Gradually, many educators have begun to realize that large-scale surveys, correlational studies, and exclusively quantitative studies do not provide actual data about events either in the classroom or the communities of students and teachers. Moreover, their findings are often used to predict the academic future of certain groups of students. Used in these ways, they reinforce stereotypes and easy generalizations about abilities of students, the inability of "others" to fit, and the disintegration of family and community life. They often allow already overworked teachers and principals to have "reasons" for closing off innovations and options in instructional methods and evaluation techniques. (p.43)

The risk of stereotypes and easy generalizations, as well as labels of incompetence or even disability raise political implications for children who are inadequately described in school assessments (McDermott & Hood, 1982). Overgeneralizations about students' abilities and competencies based on large-scale surveys, experimental studies and predetermined criteria of what counts as standard behavior restrict students' access to
appropriate instruction. Specifically, overgeneralizations limit learning opportunities for children who do not share the school’s cultural values (e.g., oral and written language practices) since their particular histories are taken as shortcomings (or "deficits") and reasons for what is perceived as incompetency. Fortunately, alternative studies carried on by educators, anthropologists and sociolinguistics (e.g., Erickson, Gumperz, Heath, Hymes, among others) as well as ethnographic psychologists (e.g., Cole and Scribner) have opened up possibilities for new definitions of competence in contrast to the traditional experimental approaches in educational psychology:

All this work has formed a cornerstone of advances in the ethnography of schooling. Its particular strength has been in showing how problems of competence display are socially organized. Inarticulateness is not a linguistic problem, stupidity is rarely a psychological problem, and misbehavior seldom a problem of moral fiber. What is at the heart of each of these failures is a social order that insists on a particular scheduling of displays of articulateness, intelligence, or morality. The same person in different situations may be called to put on quite different performances. What this literature has done is to shift the theoretical focus from competencies as the properties of persons to, competencies as the properties of situations. (McDermott & Hood, p.237).

In short, the range of questions addressed by an observer using an ethnographic approach considers the general properties of social life as constructed by its participants within and across different settings. To avoid the overgeneralizing tendencies of traditional educational research, these questions take into account and make visible what is occurring moment-by-moment, overtime and over contexts with different groups or individuals in the classroom (Green, Dixon & Putney, 1998). In literacy studies, questions guided by an ethnographic approach provide a starting point for examining and understanding the developing literate processes and practices of, and among, members of
a group as they learn through using language, reading, and writing. Thus, taking an ethnographic perspective allows to examine classroom literacy learning as co-constructed and from the perspectives of classroom members.
The overarching and initial question guiding this study was a broad one: What is the nature of literacy learning and teaching in a particular first grade classroom? In addressing this question, I found three consistent themes across the data. First, the multi-layered nature of contexts in which literacy learning and teaching was embedded and situated. In this chapter, I introduce and describe four of these layers of context: the district (and state standards), the community and family, the school, and the classroom. The second theme found across the data is the interdependence of layers of context framing a third theme, the co-constructed and negotiated nature of classroom literacy learning and teaching. As I examine in the next chapter (chapter 5), the nature of literacy learning and teaching in Julie Boyd’s classroom was shaped, supported and constrained by the interplay of multiple layers of context.

In this chapter, I display the four context layers separately even though these layers of context or planes of action were interdependent and interrelated, and mutually constituted (Rogoff, 1995) the nature of classroom life. My purpose is twofold. First, I aim to share as much as possible about each of these contexts, and to describe literacy as
framed within them. Second, I aim to build a broad picture of the multi-layered contexts in which classroom literacy teaching and learning was embedded and situated, and the range of literacy opportunities interwoven in daily classroom routines and practices. In chapter 5, I will reintegrate these layers as I trace pieces of the curriculum and literacy life in this classroom across these contexts and over time. In other words, while the initial description of the layers appear static as a result of pulling them apart, the challenge I take up in the next chapter is to show the dynamic, co-constructed and interdependent relationship of the contexts and people.

By describing and displaying four layers of context, I build a broad picture of the macro and micro influences present in opportunities created for literacy learning and teaching at the classroom level. I will show how the teacher and students used macro or outside contexts (e.g., their personal experiences within the district, the community and family, and/or the school) as frames of reference in (literacy) interactional spaces built in the classroom. Thus, the nature of classroom literacy learning and teaching was built within socially, culturally and historically situated interactional spaces. Literacy learning and teaching was embedded and situated within multi-layered contexts.

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1 "Interactional spaces have several distinguishing features: organizational pattern, time, physical space, and purpose. Interactional spaces are constructed by members of a group interacting in a particular place, at particular moments in time, and with particular configurations of participants" (Heras, 1993, p. 279). It involves events, routines or patterned ways of behaving.
Multi-layered Contexts

... [If] we removed human activity from the system of social relationships and social life, it would not exist and would have no structure. With all its varied forms, the human individual’s activity is a system in a system of social relations. It does not exist without these relations.... It turns out that the activity of separate individuals depends on their place in society, on the conditions that fall to their lot, and on idiosyncratic, individual factors. (Leont’ev, 1981, p.47)

A definition of contexts as multi-layered is critical to the understanding of the nature of literacy learning and teaching in Mrs. Boyd’s first grade classroom over the school year. All along, opportunities for classroom literacy learning and teaching were supported and/or constrained by all contexts outside the classroom, and by the interactional spaces built inside the classroom. That is, interactional spaces were created and constituted in relation to, embedded within, and taking into account the district, the community and family, and/or school contexts. Further, literacy learning and teaching was situated in an evolving classroom community, which was itself situated within multiple layers of context.

The contexts outside the classroom go out as far as societal influences such as sociocultural values, the history of public education in the United States, the national standards-based reform movement, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), national and state legislation, the public debate over whole language versus phonics approaches to reading instruction, etc. In this study, I focus on three layers of context outside the classroom: the district, the community and family, and the school (figure 4.1). The classroom context and how literacy was framed at the classroom level
(through opportunities for literacy learning and teaching) were embedded and situated within these outside layers.

Figure 4.1 displays these contexts as physical spaces. Dashes were used to indicate communication between contexts although they do not fully illustrate the permeability and co-constructed relationship among them (which will be addressed in chapter 5). The classroom was situated in the center in order to display its embeddedness within other contexts. There is a level of hierarchy in between the district’s decisions and guidelines and the school, classroom and community and family contexts. Nevertheless, in interactional spaces built in the classroom, the teacher had a lot of power on choices made in her ongoing decision-making, as well as students had the power of choosing how to respond and interact in the classroom.

Below I describe each of these layers and the classroom context (i.e., the teacher, the students, and opportunities for literacy learning and teaching). I first describe the district context, Maple Grove School District, followed by a description of Highwood Elementary. I describe the community and family context later because of the close interdependence between how literacy was framed by the district and school contexts. Last, I describe the classroom context.
Figure 4.1 Multiple Layers of Context
Maple Grove School District

Maple Grove School District is located in a small city next to a fast growing mid-size city. It is a suburban district involving 28 schools with an enrollment of approximately 20,000 students. It has 17 elementary schools, 5 middle schools, 3 high schools, and 2 special schools. Following a commitment to excellence, the district's mission is to meet, in partnership with the community, the educational needs of their diverse population of learners. The district is also committed to site-based management, which has allowed the development of collaborative working relationships in its schools.

Three years ago, Maple Grove school district adopted an English/language arts course of study that incorporates a developmental and integrated approach to literacy learning and teaching. The district's English/language arts course of study endorses and extends the state's Model Competency-Based Language Arts Program (Ohio Department of Education, 1992). The state's recent competency-based education legislation provides a model for appropriate instruction, assessment, and intervention. It requires the board of education of each school district to implement a competency-based education program for grades one through twelve. The state's competency-based language arts programs support a developmental and integrated approach to language arts instruction, which focuses on the implementation of purposeful activities. In other words,

The curriculum should be comprehensive in scope, and sequenced so as to provide developmentally appropriate instruction as necessary throughout the k-12 continuum. ... Instruction should be tailored to the individual needs of the learners.

... [Teachers] should take advantage of every opportunity to translate the separate strands [subject areas and their objectives] into an integrated language arts program as they develop lessons and/or units to implement the curriculum.

... [The] best way to provide language arts instruction is to integrate strands as
students use language for authentic purposes and audiences. This integration often occurs most successfully in an interdisciplinary setting where students have a real purpose and audience for their language learning. (Ohio Department of Education, 1992, pp.1-7)

For first grade level, the state’s and district’s language arts course of study include specific objectives and performance goals for four subject areas: (1) reading, (2) writing, (3) listening/visual literacy, and (4) oral communication. Figure 4.2 describes the main objectives for each of the four subject areas as defined by the state’s Model Competency-Based Language Arts Program and the district’s course of study.

The district’s language arts course of study extends the state’s model in that it provides sample activities or examples of possible ways to accomplish program objectives. According to these sample activities, literacy instruction can take many forms (e.g., shared reading, read aloud, individual reading, partner reading, literacy groups, guided writing, shared writing, journal writing, writing workshop, group editing, shared projects, plays/dramas, tapes, computer software, murals, music, playtime, etc.) and interactional patterns (e.g., individual work, interactions with a classmate or teacher, whole-class and small group interactions).
**Reading**
- Use of three cueing systems (semantic, structural and grapho-phonetic cues) when reading texts
- Use of reading strategies (monitoring, self-correction, cross-checking, and searching strategies)
- Develop reading fluency
- Develop the ability to use prior knowledge during pre-reading activities
- Predict story events using title and pictures before and during reading
- Use simple texts to gather information
- Read quietly for a sustained period of time every day; and read to and with others
- Read stories from a variety of genres
- Develop reading comprehension, and ability to discuss in whole-class and small groups books read and heard
- Communicate thoughts, feelings, judgments, understandings, and attitudes about reading material through multi-media activities (literature logs, journals, murals, visual illustrations, music, re-telling of the story, etc.)
- Engage students in the development of the classroom's literary environment
- Read books related to a central class theme that integrates multiple subjects
- Learn to see reading as an integral part of daily life and as a way to explore new ideas and interests

**Writing**
- Write/draw for a variety of purposes on a daily basis (e.g., compose labels, captions, charts, thank you notes, lists of directions, sequence of events and stories in response to a theme or content area, topic or story read aloud)
- Develop awareness of print conventions in purposeful writing (i.e., correct manuscript letter formation, directionality, spacing, capitals, ending punctuation)
- Begin to spell high-frequency words in purposeful writing activities
- Demonstrate expanding knowledge of grapho-phonemic relationships by using temporary spellings when uncertain of correct spelling in written communication
- Identify relationships among and between words (beginning sounds and clusters, rhyming words, word families, webbing, thematic vocabulary, etc.)
- Write complete sentences, with teacher support
- Compose in a variety of small and large group settings (e.g., creative writing, journal writing, dialog response journal, shared writing, pre-writing activities)
- Participate in group editing, and share compositions with a variety of audiences

**Listening/Visual Literacy**
- Listen to and view a variety of media and materials appropriate to age and developmental levels
- Identify and discuss a poem/rhyme, story or informational piece
- Identify and discuss sequences of events within a story
- Identify letters by name and sound in meaningful context
- Read environmental signs and symbols
- Use vocabulary gained through listening/viewing experiences
- Demonstrate respect for the rights of speakers
- Participate in language experiences that contribute to interdisciplinary understandings, including compassion, courtesy and tolerance

**Oral Communication**
- Express complete thoughts approximating correct grammar
- Speak effectively and clearly
- Use vocabulary which has been introduced in themes or topics studied in the classroom
- Participate in small or whole-group discussions

Figure 4.2 First Grade Language Arts Program: Main Objectives
The state’s competency-based education program provides a model not only for appropriate language arts instruction but also for assessment and intervention. Districts are required to implement classroom level assessment strategies and standardized district-wide, grade-level assessments. According to the state’s Model Competency-Based Language Arts Program, assessment strategies conducted at the classroom level focus on the ongoing assessment of student progress (Ohio Department of Education, 1992). They inform instructional decisions, including the need for intervention services. These strategies should consider the classroom local context; be meaningful to students and sensitive to short-term change in their knowledge; and focus on both processes and products in language arts learning (Ohio Department of Education, 1992). They include the observation of children as they work and interact with others; assessment of children’s works; assessment through oral and written means; and collection of evidences of children’s literacy growth over time in portfolios.

According to the state’s Model Competency-Based Language Arts program, large-scale assessments are “best used to inform policymaking relevant to curricular programs” as well as to assess individual students’ competencies in comparison to other students (Ohio Department of Education, 1992, p.2). Maple Grove School District’s implementation of the state’s competency-based education program has involved the standardized administration of annual district-wide, grade-level assessments. Since the past school year, the district has implemented competency-based education (CBE) testing in reading, writing and math. The district is also required to administer state level achievement tests for students in grades four, six, nine and twelve.
In grades k-3, district-wide CBE testing includes a sequence of tests that teachers (in most cases independently) have to complete in order to meet district deadlines. At first grade level, the students' reading, writing and mathematics competency are assessed in the beginning and end of the school year, and a copy of their scores is sent to the district's central office. The literacy assessment includes two tests: the Observation Survey (Clay, 1993b) and the district's writing rubric. In the beginning and at the end of the school year, all students are assessed on four components of the Observation Survey: letter identification, hearing and recording sounds in words (or dictation), writing vocabulary, and text reading (i.e., using the Scott Foresman's testing packet). The district's writing rubric involves one writing sample per student collected twice a year. As I describe later in this section, the writing samples are collected and scored following district-wide proficiency guidelines.

Starting this year, schools in the district had the option of concentrating their beginning of the year assessment schedule over the first three days of school. Based on teachers' complaint about the difficulty of administering assessments done as well as starting up their classroom routines and curriculum, the district had offered the possibility of a staggered entrance schedule. That is, schools had the option of dividing students in small groups for the first three days of school.

Maple Grove School District also implemented school-wide and district-wide authentic forms of assessments. The district was involved in the development of a district-wide authentic assessment project, which resulted in the development of school-wide student progress reports for parents, and district-wide benchmarks in reading,
writing and math for K-8. This project was developed on by the district’s central curriculum committee, district and school administrators, teachers, students, parents and university faculty. Highwood Elementary took an active part in this process by initiating authentic assessment methods and procedures, and as one of the district’s pilot schools for the district-wide benchmarks. Currently, schools within the district can choose between traditional grade cards and other forms of documentation. Traditional grade cards have letter grades such as A, B, C, and Ds. Other forms of documentation consist of authentic forms of assessment, such as student progress reports, which follow a developmental continuum. In Maple Grove School District’s elementary schools, students’ grade cards or progress reports are sent to their families every nine weeks.

Maple Grove School District implemented district-wide reading and writing benchmarks two years ago. K-8 teachers in the district are now required to record student’s literacy progress on a developmental continuum at least twice a year. The same form is used from kindergarten until eighth grade, and it is kept in the students’ cumulative folders. The district’s benchmarks for reading and writing follow a developmental literacy continuum, which was adapted from Highwood’s student progress report and its parent handbook. The literacy continuum involves five stages of reading and writing development: emerging (kindergarten/first grade), beginning (first grade/second grade), developing (second grade/third grade/fourth grade), advancing (fourth grade/fifth grade/sixth grade) and consolidating (sixth grade/seventh grade/eighth grade).
In addition to district-wide, grade-level assessments, Maple Grove School District is required to administer state level achievement tests for students in grades four, six, nine and twelve as determined by state legislation. In 1987, Substitute House Bill 231 provided for the establishment of a statewide high school proficiency testing program, and since then, additional legislation has been “enacted to modify and expand this testing program to include proficiency testing at four grade levels: 4, 6, 9 and 12” (Ohio Department of Education, 1997). The proficiency testing program assesses each of these grade levels in reading, writing, mathematics, science and citizenship. The test is based on the state’s adopted model courses of study, and expected learning outcomes. The reading and writing parts of the fourth grade proficiency testing are based on the state’s Model Competency-Based Language Arts Program.

The fourth-grade proficiency test was first administered in Maple Grove School District, as well as in other districts in the state, in the spring of 1995. Later, in 1997, Senate Bill 55 set out minimum standards for school district performance in state level proficiency tests, and established the “Fourth Grade Guarantee” and other academic remediation provisions (Ohio Department of Education, 1999). The expected state performance standards for school districts is of at least 75% of fourth graders proficient on the reading, writing, mathematics and citizenship tests. Maple Grove School District has had a history of low scores in the fourth grade proficiency test. Although the district’s reading and writing scores in 1996 were just above the state performance standards, in 1997 and 1998 the scores were below the standards. In addition, in 1998, only 26% of the fourth-grade students passed all five parts of the test.
The state’s “Fourth Grade Guarantee” aims to ensure that “students are reading at least at grade level before going on to the more demanding rigors of middle school and then high school” (Ohio Department of Education, 1999). It mandates that any fourth grade student who fails to pass the reading portion of the state’s fourth grade proficient test will be retained beginning with the 2001-02 school year. The fourth grade reading guarantee also requires (1) intervention services during first, second and third grade; (2) the assessment of first, second, and third grade students at the end of the school year in order to identify students in need of intervention; and (3) administering the fourth grade reading proficiency test three times a year to fourth graders.

In an attempt to prevent and identify students who may be affected by the state’s fourth grade guarantee, as well as to increase the district’s fourth grade reading proficiency scores, Maple Grove School District has defined new proficiency standards for reading and writing in the primary grades. Starting this school year, the district raised standards for reading proficiency for first and second grade levels. First graders are now expected to read at level 14\(^2\) (in comparison to level 12 last year). Next year, first graders are expected to be reading at level 16 by the end of the school year.

It might be a good idea to remind teachers that our standards for reading proficiency at 1\(^{st}\) and 2\(^{nd}\) grades are going up this year. First grade students will need to be reading at or above level 14 in June to be considered proficient (this will increase to level 16 next school year). Second grade students will need to be reading at or above level 20 in June to be considered proficient. I believe this goes to level 22 for next school year, but I’ll need to double check that. (Maple Grove School District’s Central Office Memorandum, August 1998)

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\(^2\) Levels are estimated based on the Scott Foresman’s (1979) testing packet for text reading leveling.
At the same time, the district has recently established new standards for writing proficiency at first grade level. According to district’s standards, the writing of a proficient first grade writer should include: 2-4 (or more) simple sentences related to a prompt; a message that makes sense; consistent use of dominant consonants and some vowel sounds; more recognizable and/or high frequency words (message can be read without relying on teacher scripting); evident spacing between words; and some attempts to use correct capitalization and ending punctuation. As mentioned earlier, first graders’ writing proficiency is assessed in the beginning and end of the school year. First grade teachers are required to collect two writing samples per student, in which students are asked to draw a picture and write about a specific topic (i.e., animals). To determine the students’ writing proficiency, the teachers have to sort and rank their writing samples based upon a score sheet or writing rubric defined by the district. As shown in figure 4.3, the district’s writing sample score sheet identifies the characteristics of advanced, proficient and non-proficient first grade writers. The district’s writing scoring procedure is similar to the state’s “holistic scoring” method, which is used to score the fourth grade proficiency test in writing (Ohio Department of Education, 1997). According to state documents,

Readers using this method [holistic scoring] consider the papers as a whole, using the individual characteristics of the rubric as a guide. They are looking for the integration of all four elements of good writing: content, organization, use of language, and writing conventions. Weaknesses in one area may be compensated for by strengths in another; however, high-scoring papers demonstrate strength in all four areas. … [A] rubric for holistic scoring … is a 4-point scale. This scale represents the different levels of writing proficiency demonstrated … (Ohio Department of Education, 1997)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4-Point Response (Advanced writer)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All sentences develop the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows some variation in sentence structure and length</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of story (beginning, middle, end) and use of story language may be evident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing words and expanded vocabulary may be evident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May attempt dialogue in narrative pieces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of conventional spelling of high frequency words and more accurate use of vowel patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of correct end punctuation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistently capitalizes first word, pronoun “I” and proper names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing may exhibit some unique characteristics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3-Point Response (Proficient writer)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writes 2-4 (or more) simple sentences related to the prompt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message makes sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent use of dominant consonants and some vowel sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes more recognizable and/or high frequency words (message can be read without relying on teacher scripting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spacing between words is evident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some attempts to use correct capitalization and ending punctuation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2-Point Response (Not proficient writer)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writes 1-2 simple sentences related to the prompt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing contains identifiable letters within the message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses beginning sounds in temporary spellings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some additional sound/symbol correspondence may be evident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates some use of spacing between words and correct directional patterns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1-Point Response (Not proficient writer)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understands that language can be written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message may be one word labels or simple words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing may/may not be recognizable as real letters and may be anywhere on the page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May scribble or draw pictures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacks knowledge of relationship between letters and sounds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0-Point Response (Not proficient writer)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is no response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response does not address the prompt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response indicates no understanding of the concept of writing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.3    The District’s First Grade Writing Sample Score Sheet
In the district’s writing rubric method, the students’ writing samples are scored twice (on a scale of 1-4 points), first by the teacher or first reader, and later by a second reader (a member of the district’s trained staff team). Starting this school year, if the teacher’s and second reader’s scores were the same, that was the student’s score. If they were not the same, a third reader (a teacher from a different school building) had to score the writing sample, and the scores of the second and third readers were the ones used. Children with a 7/8 score are considered advanced, 5/6 score proficient, and 4 or below not proficient. For example, a child is considered advanced if her/his writing sample (either from the beginning or end of the school year) is rated a 4-point response by the first and second readers. If the two readers rated the child’s writing sample a 3-point response, s/he is considered proficient.

Thus, the district’s criteria for scoring first graders’ writing samples represent their expectations for students at this grade level; that is, their definition of first grade writing proficiency. The students’ writing proficiency is determined by two writing samples based on a pre-determined prompt, as well as by the district’s scoring procedure. That is, if the teacher’s and second reader’s score do not match, the final score is defined not by the teacher’s score but by the second and third reader’s scores.

Maple Grove School District’s standards for writing and reading proficiency are a response to the state’s required competency-based education program, fourth grade proficiency testing, and fourth grade reading guarantee. By raising reading and writing standards for the primary grades, and assessing students’ writing proficiency following
the state’s “holistic scoring” method, the district expects that children will be better prepared all along, and proficiency scores will increase.

The state’s competency-based education program also includes recommendations on intervention services. According to the state’s Model Competency-Based Language Arts Program, intervention services consist of three levels: classroom level, building-level intervention, and district-level intervention. As explained by the state’s model,

Minimally, intervention should be structured through three successive levels – the classroom, the building, and the district. Ideally, these structures involved students, teachers, parents, and building and district administrators. When a student’s need for intervention cannot be satisfactory addressed by the regular classroom teacher, building and district options must be available. Building-level options might include interclass grouping, intervention assistance teams, tutorial programs, and resource/intervention rooms and teachers. District-level options might include summer school programs, extra hours programs (e.g., Saturday school), and required remedial academic programs. ...The primary responsibility for providing intervention, nevertheless, rests with the classroom teacher. (Ohio Department of Education, 1992, p.241)

In Maple Grove School District, building-level intervention rooms and teachers are available at first grade level. However, schools vary on the number and time commitment of reading specialists available to provide services. For example, Title I funding is available for reading intervention programs (i.e., Reading Recovery program) but is dependent on schools’ attendance area and number of students in free or reduced lunch. An Early Reading Initiative (ERI) program is also available, and reading teachers are assigned to work with one or two schools.

At the end of the school year, district-level intervention services for first, second and third graders were implemented as required by the state’s mandate on a fourth grade
reading guarantee. The district provided a summer intervention packet for first and second grade students who did not reach reading proficiency standards. This packet was distributed to the students’ families in grade level meetings organized by the schools’ staff development person. The first grade packets included strategies for parents to help their children at home, book lists, books, a parent book, game boards, information from the city’s public library, etc. As part of the district’s remediation provisions, summer school was offered for third graders who qualified for it.

The district’s competency-based education program has impacted its elementary schools’ language arts curriculum, assessment and intervention services. At the same time, the district’s construction of a new elementary school three years ago affected the attendance area of some of the elementary schools. For example, it changed 70% of Highwood’s attendance area. More recently, another district level change has impacted the programs offered by its elementary and middle schools. During this school year, the district implemented a split session arrangement for fifth, sixth, seventh and eight grades. Due to overcrowdness and lack of financial support, all fifth grade programs were relocated from elementary schools to middle schools. Fifth and sixth graders attended school in the morning period, and seventh and eight graders went to school in the afternoon period. In the first three months of this school year, district and school administrators with the support of teachers promoted a bond issue campaign in their communities. Fortunately, the bond issue passed, and it will finance the construction of seven new school buildings, renovations and land purchases, as well as the provisory
lease of building space. Next school year, elementary schools in district, such as Highwood, will again offer a k-5 program.

In short, following the state’s Model Competency-Based Language Arts program, Maple Grove School District has recently implemented a new language arts course of study, which is based on a developmental and integrated approach to learning and instruction. The district’s implementation of the state’s competency-based education program has also involved the implementation of district-wide, grade-level standardized assessments (or CBE testing). Maple Grove School District has also developed a district-wide authentic assessment project, which included the development of schoolwide report cards, and district-wide benchmarks in reading and writing. State legislature on fourth-grade proficiency test and a fourth grade reading guarantee has influenced the district’s implementation of new proficiency standards for reading and writing for first grade level.

As part of the district’s competency-based education program, intervention services are available although they are dependent on human resources available as well as the schools’ percentage of free or reduced lunch. The district has recently built a new elementary school, which impacted the attendance area of some of its elementary schools. As a result of lack of financial support and overcrowdness, the district’s provisory split session involved the relocation of its elementary schools’ fifth grade programs to middle schools.

The state’s performance standards on reading and writing proficiency (as determined by the model course of study and the fourth grade proficiency test) and the fourth grade reading guarantee have changed the culture of schools, and fostered a focus
on student achievement and high testing scores. Districts, schools and teachers are being compared based on their students’ scores and achievement on the state’s proficiency testing at grades four, six, nine and twelve. Families are also more focused on proficiency scores. At Maple Grove School District, in the primary grades, families and students have become more concerned about book levels and meeting the district’s proficiency standards for first and second grade levels. Now a major concern for districts, schools and teachers is to improve student achievement by meeting the state’s performance standards.

Highwood Elementary

Highwood elementary[^] was built in 1969. The school’s open-space architecture, child-centered education, schoolwide and classroom-based thematic units, integrated and literature-based curriculum, classes of paired grade levels (where students stay with the same teacher for two years), focus on authentic language experiences, and use of portfolio and authentic assessment are some of its distinguishing features. Highwood has been a professional development site affiliated with a large midwestern university’s Holmes Group initiative since 1991, one of the state’s first venture schools, and a language arts site for the state’s regional development center.

Highwood is viewed as an “informal school” within its district. Highwood’s child-centered, literature-based and thematic program has evolved over the school’s thirty-year history. Highwood’s faculty commitment to a curriculum based on children’s literature, thematic units and authentic experiences has been a schoolwide effort.

[^]: See chapter 3 for information on school demographics.
Highwood's child-centered and thematic approach is in agreement with the district's recently adopted English/ language arts course of study, which incorporates a developmental and integrated approach to literacy learning and teaching.

The school's open architectural plan has fostered a collaborative relationship among the teaching faculty. As shown in figure 4.4, the school has four closed classroom spaces and two open areas (a big open area with eight classroom spaces, and a small open area with three classroom spaces). In the open areas, bookcases and display boards, as well as other furniture and school equipment (e.g., desks, computers and file cabinets), function as dividers between the classroom areas. In general, there are open spaces in between classrooms and the furniture is low enough that it is easy to see what is happening in other classrooms. Nevertheless, during classroom time, teachers and students became so involved in their own spaces that it seemed as if they had real walls in between the classrooms. On the other hand, during calm times (i.e., recess, specials or quiet work time), teachers often circulated from one classroom to another. Their proximity seemed to facilitate interaction and communication. For example, during the school year, Mrs. Boyd constantly interacted with other teachers, especially the teachers who taught in classroom areas next to her (a third grade teacher and a first grade teacher). They exchanged classroom materials and bounced out ideas. In the winter and spring quarters, Mrs. Boyd and the first grade teacher next to her re-arranged their reading groups and exchanged students in order to avoid having to work with too many reading groups, some with only one or two students at the same reading level. This arrangement increased the frequency in which Mrs. Boyd was able to work with reading groups.
Figure 4.4 The School Map

B = Boy’s Bathroom
G = Girl’s Bathroom
Highwood’s history of collaboration was also supported by the school’s role as a professional development site, participation in a comprehensive improvement initiative, and being part of a district committed to site-based management. These collaborative experiences have “contributed to a school culture which values reflective inquiry and continual professional development” (Venture Capital Grant Proposal, 1993). The teaching faculty has acknowledged its commitment to “forging collaboratively our school improvement agenda based on the concept of a learning community” (Venture Capital Grant Proposal).

Highwood has a commitment to collaboration at the staff and student level. The school’s commitment to the development of a learning community is stated in its recently written mission statement:

The mission of ... [Highwood], a community of lifelong learners, is to provide students with a foundation for effective decision-making and creative problem-solving, while respecting themselves and others by linking children, parents, community and school to the past, present, and future in a child-centered environment where every accomplishment is valued. (Highwood’s monthly newsletter, December 1998)

As also reinforced in the school philosophy (figure 4.5), the students are encouraged to collaborate with other students by sharing their ideas and working with others. For example, during the spring, Mrs. Boyd’s students were involved in a schoolwide student-run post office in which students were encouraged to write letters not only to their classmates and families but also to other students in the school. This activity illustrates that collaboration was also promoted among students from different classrooms. This
experience also created a rich opportunity for students to use written language for an authentic purpose and audience.

Included in Highwood's mission statement and philosophy (figure 4.5) is an emphasis on encouraging children to follow their interests, and fostering a child-centered environment. As explained by Mrs. Boyd, their curriculum approach "follows the child rather than having the child follow the curriculum" (Curriculum notes, August 1998). In this sense, the school's child-centered approach extends the state and district's developmental approach to learning and teaching in that it supports an emergent curriculum. For example, Mrs. Boyd's selection of thematic units took into account the student's interests and prior experiences, as well as topics that allowed the integration of a variety of the objectives and concepts required by the language arts, science, social studies, mathematics, and/or health district course of study.

At ... [Highwood] children are viewed as motivated, capable learners. They bring to school a variety of experiences, and we try to provide learning situations that build on their existing knowledge. Children are also encouraged to follow their own interests and share their ideas and work with others. We think that children should be actively involved in learning and that the skills learned and practiced in school should be meaningful. We emphasize the relationships between the different areas of the curriculum so that instruction is centered around general themes or units that include concepts from all the curriculum areas. As we work within these themes we also utilize the resources of the community and visit and explore sites of interest. Learning, we realize, does not take place only in the classroom.

We want our students to become confident learners who are able to follow interests and solve problems individually and with others. (Parent Handbook, 1998)

Figure 4.5 The School Philosophy
As stressed in the school philosophy, Highwood's child-centered curriculum includes a developmental approach to learning which builds on students' existing knowledge and supports learning at their own progress. According to Mrs. Boyd, teachers at Highwood “support and enhance each child’s emerging abilities, whatever stage” (Curriculum notes, August 1998). The school clarifies its developmental philosophy in the Student Progress Report (1994):

At ... [Highwood] we believe that all children are unique and capable learners. Our goal is to build and expand upon the knowledge and abilities that children bring to school. We also recognize that children learn at different rates and in different ways.

In addition to a child-centered and developmental approach to learning and teaching, the school philosophy emphasizes an integrated approach to learning through the development of thematic units. The school's integrated curriculum promotes the relationships between topics and concepts from their language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and/or health district course of study (Student Progress Report Parent Handbook, 1995). Thematic units were implemented at the classroom level or schoolwide (i.e., when different classrooms worked on a common topic). At the same time, teachers made use of community resources such as related materials available at the school, materials brought by the students or their families, guest speakers, fieldtrips to sites of interest, etc. For example, Mrs. Boyd’s unit on the Rainforest was expanded by resources available at the school (i.e., a guest speaker who spent two weeks in the school talking to different classrooms about his experiences in Costa Rica), and a fieldtrip to a butterfly exhibit jointly organized by four classrooms.
The school philosophy also supports the importance of students' active involvement in the learning process. The school's focus on students' active involvement in the learning process, and thirty-year history of implementing a child-centered and thematic curriculum are in agreement with the state and district's recently developed language arts program. As described earlier, the state's Model Competency-Based Language Arts Program argues for developmentally appropriate instruction, tailored to the needs of students, and an integrated language arts program involving the development of units and/or lessons (Ohio Department of Education, 1992). It also emphasizes that the learner must be at the center of the curriculum and actively involved in all stages of the learning process.

In essence, as a school-wide effort, Highwood incorporates a child-centered, developmental, thematic and integrated approach to learning and teaching. Whole language beliefs have strongly influenced Highwood's approach to literacy learning and teaching. It has informed the teachers' understanding of how children learn, and way of looking at children (Curriculum notes, August 1998), as well as their organization of classroom environments rich in children's literature. A whole language perspective has guided their understanding that literacy is learned through meaningful and authentic experiences. As explained in the Student Progress Report Parent Handbook (1995),

Children do not become literate through work in bits and pieces, but only through experiences that are meaningful to them and occur in positive, supportive environments. Becoming literate is a complex process which occurs gradually over long periods of time. Just as an athlete improves through repeated practice over time, so do readers and writers learn through acts of reading and writing. (p.6)
Thus, the school's goal is to "create life-long readers and writers who can read and write not only for specific purposes, but also for enjoyment" (Student Progress Report Parent Handbook). Literacy learning is perceived to be of "primary importance because it is the means by which other learning often occurs. For example, we may read about a science topic, then express and extend our learning through writing" (Student Progress Report Parent Handbook). In addition, literacy is perceived as including the areas of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. These areas are in agreement with the district's language arts course of study four subject areas: reading, writing, listening/visual literacy, and oral communication.

Although teachers at Highwood follow the district's language arts course of study (which was implemented three years ago), it did not directly impact Highwood's literacy program. For many years, Highwood's literacy curriculum has involved the types of instruction or planned literacy events (e.g., shared reading, read aloud, individual reading, guided writing, etc.) suggested by the district's sample activities. In essence, many of these planned literacy events and an integrated curriculum were already in place in Highwood's program prior to the state's competency-based education program. On the other hand, the district's recent math, science and social studies course of study has required adjustments in the school's curricula.

Consistent with the school's philosophy, Highwood teachers use authentic forms of assessment such as the use of portfolios and student progress reports in addition to the ongoing assessment of student progress at the classroom level. For example, the students'
daily work and running records of their reading are used to gather information about their progress. As Mrs. Boyd explained to families early in the school year,

Your child’s daily work is an important part of our on-going assessment and makes it necessary to keep the majority of your child’s work at school for a period of time. (Curriculum notes, August 1998)

Through the ongoing assessment of students’ progress and use of authentic forms of assessment, the school supports a balanced process and product-oriented approach.

According to Mrs. Boyd, teachers at Highwood value “the process as well as the product because it is in the process that learning takes place. We celebrate the products that show evidence of learning and thinking” (Curriculum notes, August 24, 1998).

For many years, Highwood teachers have been involved in revising assessment practices and documents at school and district level. As a professional development site, Highwood teachers and university faculty have explored “approaches for enhancing traditional forms of assessment which did not provide teachers with the information they needed to make fully informed decisions about curriculum and instruction” (Ventura Capital Grant Proposal, 1993). For the past six years, Highwood has implemented a method of reporting student progress, which was developed by the school’s staff in conjunction with university faculty as part of a professional development program. As Mrs. Boyd explained to her students’ families,

Teachers at … [Highwood], as well as other teachers in the district, are not using traditional grade cards. For the past six years, … [Highwood] teachers have used a method of reporting which gives you more information about your child and his/her individual growth and development and is more reflective of what a student knows. (Curriculum notes, August 1998)
Highwood’s student progress report follows a developmental approach to learning, which “identifies the learning progression that children make as they move through the grade levels. It demonstrates that there is a range of normal development” (Student Progress Report Primary, 1994). Highwood’s progress report is in agreement with the district and state’s focus on developmentally appropriate instruction. As the Maple Grove School District’s administration informed families in a letter written on the envelope in which Highwood’s students report cards were sent home:

This [student progress report] ... reflects our point of view about learning which maintains that children learn at their individual rates and in different ways. Therefore, each child’s progress is being evaluated in terms of his or her own achievement and attitude. This is consistent with the ... District’s strategic plan. Evidence of learning is gathered through teacher observation as well as through assessment of oral and written work. Selected work samples showing your child’s progress are being kept and will be shared with you. This report reflects your child’s growth as it relates to present classroom learning experiences. (Cover letter, Student progress report 1998-99)

The development of Highwood’s student progress report was part of a district-wide authentic assessment initiative, which also included the development of district-wide benchmarks in reading, writing and math. As previously mentioned, the district’s benchmarks in reading and writing follow a developmental literacy continuum, which was adapted from Highwood’s student progress report and its parent handbook.

As required by the district, Highwood also implements standardized district-wide, grade-level assessments (or CBE testing) in the beginning and at the end of the school year. Early in the school year, the school administration and faculty chose to implement a staggered schedule in order to facilitate teachers in meeting district’s CBE testing
requirements for reading, writing and math. According to the Highwood’s administration, the staggered entrance was “designed to allow teachers and students to get acquainted in a relaxed setting and make the child’s first day as positive and rewarding as possible” (Highwood’s monthly newsletter, August 1998). The goal was to expose students to the school routine and to test them in reading, writing and math. The principal and reading specialists helped the teachers in completing the testing.

Among Highwood teachers, there was a general concern about meeting the district’s CBE assessment expectations, particularly meeting new proficiency standards for first and second grade levels, and making connections within the content to be taught all along the primary grades with the content assessed in the fourth-grade proficiency test. With the state’s mandate of a fourth grade reading guarantee and the district’s new proficiency standards for reading and writing, the pressure, which was originally put on fourth grade teachers, has been distributed among all the primary grade teachers.

In order to support children’s learning and extend the school’s learning community, Highwood staff worked on including parents and the wider community (other elementary schools within the district and community groups) as a major part of its five-year Venture Capital Grant improvement efforts. These efforts aimed at increasing family involvement due to the school’s new attendance area. They were more successful with the families than with the community groups. Currently, with the school’s new attendance area, parent involvement is still a concern. In particular, due to new district’s assessment requirements and proficiency standards as well as the fourth grade reading guarantee, the teachers view family support as instrumental especially to students who are below grade
level standards. Teachers see family support at home (e.g., completing homework assignments, and reading regularly) as an important indicator of student success in the school’s literacy curriculum and on meeting reading and writing proficiency standards.

The school’s new attendance area promoted more diversity within the school community, and impacted the school’s literacy curriculum. According to Mrs. Boyd and other teachers, in general, Highwood’s prior attendance area involved a large percentage of families who believed in the school’s educational philosophy. These families lived in the area or had special permission for their children to attend the school. The new attendance area serves a more social and economically diverse community, the level of school involvement has declined, and students start school with less prior knowledge of school literacy practices. The wider range of student’s literacy backgrounds and academic levels has required Highwood teachers to work with a wider range of students’ needs and backgrounds. This has added pressure to the teachers’ responsibilities, and a larger group of parents who do not participate in ways expected by the school.

During the school year, Highwood staff and its Parent and Teacher Association (PTA) promoted a range of family activities in order to bring families to the school. Families were informed of school events and schedule through Highwood’s monthly newsletter. The PTA encouraged parents to meet other families, and visit and participate at the school through organized events such as Skating Parties, Donuts with Dad, Muffins with Mom, Family Bingo Night, Spring Festival, etc. The school also welcomed classroom volunteers. For example, throughout the year, Mrs. Boyd had family members and/or former Highwood students (who were going to school half-day because of the
district's provisory split session) helping her out in the classroom and during fieldtrips, and organizing classroom celebrations (i.e., the Harvest party and Valentine party). These classroom parties were scheduled at the school level; that is, all classrooms were having their parties at the same time and day.

Highwood’s administration expects teachers to conference with families individually at least once a year. As they explained to families in the school’s monthly newsletter:

Parent/Teacher conferences are an important part of your child’s education. Just looking at a progress report may not give you the full picture of how well your child is doing in school.

Many ... [Highwood] teachers are having conferences on Thursday, November 12 from 3-8 P.M.; although some teachers are holding conferences at other times. Our goal is to meet with every parent. If you have not had the opportunity to schedule a conference, please contact you child’s teacher. If you wish, you can also conference with the music, art and P.E. teachers. (Highwood’s monthly newsletter, November 1998)

According to Mrs. Boyd, the teachers are allocated a total of twelve hours per year for conferences by the district administration but they always exceed this number of hours. The school expects teachers to hold parent conferences but other types of meetings are optional. Meetings in the beginning of the year to inform families of grade level programs are less frequent now due to low attendance, and Mrs. Boyd is the only teacher doing student-led conferences. The teachers also varied in their ways of communicating with families and sending homework assignments (e.g., weekly letters, agenda books, monthly homework assignments, weekly homework folders, etc.). For example, Mrs. Boyd sent to the families a weekly letter called “Ask Me About”, and a monthly homework calendar (see copies in Appendix E and F). As she explained,
The weekly letter basically was my brainchild. It began when I started teaching kindergarten after the first set of conferences. Many of the parents said they didn't know what was going on at school which makes sense since some of the children left school at 11:00 and didn't see their parents until 6:00. So I came up with this idea to help parents know what questions to ask their children about what happened in school. It was adopted by other teachers. Many use it now — more at the primary level since the intermediate grades use the agenda books. I do the homework calendar — it was something [another teacher] ... and I implemented 8 years ago when we taught second grade. We grew tired of sending home the same old homework and thought the calendar was an easier way of communicating ideas to parents. It gives them some flexibility in completing assignments. The downside is that many assignments are not returned — it is not taken as seriously. … Other teachers, even in 1st grade, send home weekly homework folders with spelling words, math sheets, etc. (Email communication, June 1999)

In January, Highwood’s k-2 teachers organized a Literacy Night event for families called “The Snowball Express” (copy of flyer sent to families in Appendix G). This event was funded with Title 1 funding. The primary teachers and other school faculty had organized it for the first time in the prior school year. It involved grade-level sessions in which teachers demonstrated literacy events and practices used in the classroom to promote reading and writing (e.g., interactive writing, shared reading, etc.). In both years, the Snowball Express had good family attendance.

Highwood’s intervention services for the primary grades consisted of two part-time reading specialists serving three first grades of approximately twenty-five children. The morning reading teacher worked for the district’s Early Reading Initiative (ERI) program. She worked with four groups of five to six students for a period of thirty-five minutes. In the afternoon, the Reading Recovery teacher worked with four students individually and with a group of five students for a period thirty-five minutes. Both ERI and Reading Recovery were pullout programs. Depending on their availability, in past
years, the reading specialists also worked with second graders. This year the school used Title 1 funding to pay two teachers to work after school with second graders.

Additional support for first grade teachers at the classroom level was not provided unless they had a student teacher or regular volunteers (parents, family members, and/or former students). In the spring, the school administration and teaching faculty applied for a state grant to reduce class size. The grant will allow the school to hire two new teachers, what will decrease to eighteen students the class size of their first and second grade classrooms in the next school year.

Prior to this school year, the district's split session alternative affected teaching staff arrangements at Highwood. Teachers, who were teaching fifth grade and had taught in the school for many years, changed their grade assignments. Other teachers, with less seniority and concerns about being transferred to a middle school building, moved to other districts. On the other hand, not having three fifth grade classrooms increased school space particularly in Highwood's big open area. With the split session, instead of having ten classrooms, the open area had eight classrooms (see figure 4.4). Mrs. Boyd’s classroom space almost doubled this year. In addition to having more space, the big open area was less crowded and the noise level decreased. Material resources such as extra bookshelves were also available from primary teachers who transferred to different districts. For example, the availability of additional resources was helpful in Mrs. Boyd organization of classroom space, and in creating more private areas for students’ individual or group work. However, next year, with the fifth grade program returning to
the school, classroom space in the open area will be reduced in order to allocate ten classrooms.

In sum, Highwood's history of collaboration, mission and philosophy aim at creating a learning community in which students become life-long learners. Literacy learning is viewed as a complex process that gradually occurs over long periods of time (Student Progress Report Parent Handbook, 1995). It is also considered of primary importance as a medium by which other learning occurs. Literacy teaching and learning is integrated with other areas of the curriculum through the implementation of thematic units and children's literature used daily in the classroom (Curriculum notes, August 1998). Authentic assessment constitutes one of the distinguishing features of Highwood's educational program. Highwood teachers value the use of portfolios, and they have been actively involved in the development of a student progress report following a developmental philosophy. The Highwood's history of implementing a child-centered, literature-based and thematic curriculum is in agreement with the state and district's recently developed language arts course of study. As a result, Highwood teachers did not need to make adjustments in their language arts curricula in order to follow the district's course of study. On the other hand, the state's mandate on a fourth grade reading guarantee, and the district's new proficiency standards for reading and writing (for first and second grade levels) have distributed the pressure of preparing students for the fourth-grade proficiency test among all the primary grades teachers. At the same time, family involvement is a concern particularly with new proficiency standards and the school's new attendance area.
The Community and Family Context

Three years ago the district built a new elementary school, which divided Highwood's attendance area and changed 70% of its student population. Most of its student population was transferred to two other elementary schools. In this section, I describe the school's new attendance area from Julie Boyd's insider perspective and information received from other school faculty. This section also examines the families, with children in Mrs. Boyd's classroom, perspectives, expectations, and school involvement. It is based on the families' responses to a classroom survey, homevisits to five families, and family participation in school and classroom events.

Mrs. Boyd has lived in the city where Highwood is located for twenty-four years. Before teaching at Highwood, she worked in different jobs within the area and raised three children. Her middle child went to school at Highwood. Her younger child started school at Highwood but was transferred to another school after Mrs. Boyd and her family moved to another section of the city. She started teaching at Highwood when her younger child started first grade. Before starting her teaching career, she worked for the city's post office and had the opportunity to deliver mail around the city. She also worked in the city's library. These experiences and her fourteen years teaching at Highwood have given Mrs. Boyd a broad understanding of the communities within the school's attendance area. In our first day of data collection, she gave me a tour around the school's attendance area.

Mrs. Boyd's perspective is that the school's previous attendance area included a larger number of middle income families, who were involved in the school and supported its philosophy and educational program. As explained by Mrs. Boyd, the school used to
be more locally situated, and many of these families had bought houses in the area so that their children could attend Highwood. It also involved a large number of families with special permission who provided their own transportation. These families were interested in Highwood's child-centered curriculum, which was unique in the district. Recently other elementary schools in the district are implementing similar curriculum programs (although not a schoolwide effort) what gives families the option of keeping their children within their attendance area.

According to Mrs. Boyd, some families, with houses in the previous attendance area, were upset with the change. They met with the district administration but were not able to change it. With the new attendance area, some of these families continued to enroll their children in the school by receiving special permission. Currently, it is still common for the school to have children from outside its attendance area. Nevertheless, with other schools implementing similar programs, there is less interest in requesting special permission.

The new attendance area changed 70% of Highwood's student population. Most of the students are now bussed, and 20% of them, who live close by, walk to the school. Highwood currently serves lower to middle income families primarily from a Caucasian background (see table in chapter 3 for student demographics information). The school serves families from a diverse range of professional backgrounds (i.e., professionals, blue-collar workers, private business, etc.), although they are predominantly from a working class background. About 25% of Highwood's student population receive free lunch which qualified the school to receive Title I funding. The school serves families
from eight different sections of the city: Salem, Salem village, Kinston Village, Highwood, Asherbrand, Parkview and Clayton Station. Highwood picked up Salem, Salem Village and Kinston Village after the change of attendance area. These sections used to be served by a different school.

Fifty percent of Highwood’s current student population lives in Salem or Salem Village. These sections have a mixture of five to twenty-year old, one family houses in a price range more affordable (around $90,000) than other sections of the city. In some families, one parent (usually the mother) stays at home. According to Mrs. Boyd, some of the families initially had concerns about the school’s philosophy and open space areas since they were familiar with a more traditional program.

The school’s attendance area also involves families living in Highwood, Kinston Village, Asherbrand, Parkview, and Clayton Station. The Highwood section involves one family houses that are close or on walking distance to the school. Twenty percent of the school’s student population live in this section. In Kinston Village, the majority of the population is African-American. In this area, there is a wide range of houses, some of them are new, and others are old and in inadequate condition. Many families are on welfare, or live from social security or retirement. Mrs. Boyd explained that in the past five years, a lot of work has been done in the village, especially getting rid of empty houses. The Asherbrand section consists of different rental apartment complexes. According to Mrs. Boyd, families living in the Asherbrand section tend to move more often than the ones living in other sections of the school’s attendance area. Highwood has few students from Parkview section, which involves families living in trailers. Clayton
station is a government housing section, which houses families in welfare. To be eligible, families have to qualify and pass a screening, and they are expected to keep the area clean. Most of them are single-parent families, in which the mother is going to school, and needs to stay in the area temporarily until getting her degree.

In general, half of the student population tends to stay in Highwood for their elementary school years. During the school year, the students' mobility rate varies from year to year. In the previous school year, none of Mrs. Boyd's students moved and she received three new students. This year four of her students moved during the school year and two students moved before the end of the year. She received three new students in the middle of the year.

In the first week of school, Mrs. Boyd sent to her students' families a survey (copy in Appendix H). The survey asked information about the children (e.g., strengths, interests, feelings about school), the families' expectations of how Mrs. Boyd could best help them during the year, and their interest in being involved in school/classroom activities. It was a voluntary survey, and 85% of the families responded. Their responses varied in length and areas in which they focused on. Some families provided more information about their children and/or about their school expectations. Most families showed interest in being involved in school activities depending on their availability.

Figure 4.6 summarizes the families' responses and provides a broad picture of their perspectives on children's strengths, interests outside school and feelings about school. The families' descriptions of their children's strengths focused on their learning attitude, learning skills and social skills. Children's interests involved sports, and outdoor
and indoor activities. Based on the families’ responses, most children had positive feelings about school although some had concerns. In their responses, families primarily stressed the importance of Mrs. Boyd’s building a supportive relationship with their children. Some families also specified learning skills that they considered important to be taught. Included in the family survey was a question on families’ interest in becoming involved in the classroom or school. The families varied on their availability to participate at school or to help from home.
**Perspectives**

1. **Children’s Strengths**
   - **Learning attitude:** liking to read (2)*; being inquisitive; not afraid to try anything; confident; liking to try to do work; enjoying learning (2).
   - **Learning skills:** reading (2); mathematics (4); writing; computer skills; spatial or mechanical learning; building; knowledge of nature; art (2); creative; verbal; active imagination; intelligent (2); listening well.
   - **Social skills:** friendly; personable; kind (2); funny (3); helpful (2); teacher pleasing; outgoing; communicative, social, loving, good at following directions, independent, being a good kid in school.

2. **Children’s Interests**
   - **Sports:** football; baseball (4); bowling; soccer (2); gymnastics (2).
   - **Outdoor activities:** camping; fishing; swimming (3); running; riding bike (3); roller-skating; playing with neighborhood friends (4); playing with siblings or relatives (5); visiting relatives.
   - **Indoor activities:** cartoons (Power rangers, motorcycles); TV shows (4); videos (2); building things (2); magic tricks; experiments; helping to cook; makeup; acting out movies; Nintendo games (2); board games (2); drawing; singing and dancing; Barbies and baby dolls; reading (2); coloring; counting objects; making up stories.
   - **Social activities:** Cub Scout (2); cheerleading (2).

3. **Children’s Feelings about School**
   - **Positive feelings:** enjoy it (16); enjoy the social aspect of school (6); want to learn new things (3); like to show off new knowledge at home; interest in the school’s new climbing wall.
   - **Concerns:** apprehensive about making new friends; miss more playtime like in kindergarten; sometimes sees school as being boring; sometimes discouraged because he doesn’t remember instructions the first couple of times; insecure about his abilities (“I’ll never learn to read”).

**Expectations of Mrs. Boyd’s Teaching**

- **Supportive relationship:** encouragement (3); listening/attention (4); approach things in a fun manner (2); keep child on task/busy (4); building good study habits; help him meet other students; further love of learning and school; communicate with home (2); love the child’s uniqueness; helping him learn that learning is fun, helping him grow socially; motivate him in order to get what you know he’s capable of giving.
- **Promoting learning skills:** encourage to write stories; building confidence in reading and/or writing (2); building math skills; helping her to learn new things; help him to read; challenge in math and other areas; keep child moving forward; challenge child; encourage creativity; further listening skills.

**Availability for School Involvement**

- **School participation:** special events and fieldtrips (5); when work schedule permits (2); not sure; help in the classroom (2); available in case Mrs. Boyd can’t find anyone else (2).
- **Home participation:** helping by doing things at home (2).

* number of responses

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Figure 4.6 Families’ Perspectives, Expectations and Availability
The parents' high percentage of response to Mrs. Boyd's survey indicates their interest in their children's learning, and in sharing information about them. Homevisits to the families of five focal students confirmed their responses to Mrs. Boyd's survey, and their interest in supporting their children's learning. These homevisits provided a rich opportunity to interact with the families and children at their homes, and learn more about their interests, expectations and/or concerns.

In the first month of school, the school's Reading Recovery teacher and I visited the house of one of the focal students (Luana). In November, Mrs. Boyd and I visited the house of four focal students (Derek, Laurie, Kiera and Bobby). Mrs. Boyd and I had originally planned to visit seven families (including Juanita, Luana and Alice's). Juanita moved in October to a different school. We did not receive response to our letters from Luana and Alice's families, and they both moved in the middle of the school year. At the end of the school year, I met again with Derek, Laurie, Kiera and Bobby's families.

Luana, Laurie and Kiera's families lived in the school's attendance area. Luana lived in Kinston village, Laurie in Salem village, and Kiera in the Highwood section. Bobby and Derek had special permission to attend the school. During the homevisits, it was evident the families were interested in their children's literacy learning. For example, Luana's mother and older cousin shared their concern and interest in supporting Luana's literacy learning. Luana had been selected by the Reading Recovery program because she was reading below the school's grade level expectations for the beginning of the year.

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4 Luana had been selected for the Reading Recovery program, and the main purpose of this visit was to explain to the family the program as well as resources (e.g., family workshops and meetings) available through the district's Title 1 program.
Luana was temporarily living with her mother at her cousin and uncle’s house. She was the only child in the house. Luana’s mother and her cousin worked full time, and they both shared the responsibility of taking care of Luana. According to Luana’s family, she was eager to learn how to read and write. Luana’s mother showed us four books (i.e., phonics books) recently bought to help Luana learn how to read and write. During the visit, Luana wrote and drew on one of the books. Her cousin also enrolled Luana in their church’s Sunday school where she could sing (something Luana enjoyed doing) and learn how to read and write. Although Luana’s mother’s choice of books differed from the school’s focus on literacy learning in the context of whole text, nevertheless, she and Mrs. Boyd shared similar goals in that both aimed to support Luana’s literacy learning.

The other families also exposed their children to a range of literacy experiences. In Kiera and Laurie’s houses, a range of children’s literature (e.g., Disney books, chapter books, etc.) was available, as well as, access to computer, videos and close contact with older siblings. Kiera had an older sister and an older brother, and Laurie had an older brother and a younger sister. Both girls enjoyed reading and writing at home, they constantly wrote for different purposes (e.g., lists, cards, notes, or stories), and read independently or with their parents or siblings. In Kiera and Laurie’s family, both parents worked outside the home although Laurie’s mom worked part time. In the beginning of the school year, the expectations of Kiera and Laurie’s families were different than Luana’s family. Both girls were already reading books at or above first grade level, and their writing vocabulary involved a variety of high frequency words and close

^ See chapter 3 for description of the schedule and purpose of these homevisits, as well as the process of gaining entry.
approximations of new words. Their families were concerned that they continued to be challenged and moved forward. As Laurie’s mother wrote to Mrs. Boyd before parent conferences in November:

I would like to see ... [Laurie] continue to grow in areas of reading, writing and math. She is very interested in writing and drawing. I would like to see her do more extensive, more complicated projects in those areas - could she maybe do “book reports” with illustrations- on books she brings home or on books we read at home? Also, I think she is capable of doing more difficult math (e.g., double-digit addition); we will try to work on this with her at home. (Parent conference written communication, November 1998)

Kiera’s parents aimed for her “To achieve whatever is possible in her schoolwork” (Parent conference written communication, November 1998). They tried to step back and not push considering their prior experience with two older children, and Kiera’s genuine interest of school activities and literacy practices (which she practiced at home spontaneously).

She loves school and I think the reading and the writing are her favorite parts, whereas I think the math is coming along but I think it’s because of the reading. (^^^) I totally stepped back. With my other two children, I did the preschool and I did – I worked with them every night. And I think I pushed too hard and about the fourth or fifth grade both of my kids lost total interest, and so I’ve stepped back and let her come to me. (^^^) Of course, if we see we have homework than we do it but ... or I make her sit at the table and do it. But she ... I let her come to me because I don’t wanna burn her out because she just seems ... head and shoulders above what I ever imagined that the child I gave birth to [laughs] ... And my grandson, she’s taught my grandson so much. He’s four, he’ll be five two days before she’s seven and ... I see that, she tries and she does, she sits up like Mrs. Boyd does and holds the book and she reads to him and tells him a little about it, and the math and the writing. (AT, Kiera’s mother, June 1999)

6 Response to Mrs. Boyd’s question on “what goals to you want to set for your child for the remainder of the school year?” This question was one of three questions Mrs. Boyd sent to the families in order to prepare for the parent conference in November.
7 Audiotape transcription (AT). See transcription conventions in Appendix A.
Early in the school year, they had concerns with math although they felt that as long as she was doing fine in school and was genuinely interested in school activities, they did not need to provide additional assistance. Kiera’s mother thought it was great that Mrs. Boyd was able to accommodate different students’ ability levels without making it noticeable. At the same time, she felt that schools should reinforce correct spelling at higher grade levels. After looking at papers written by her husband’s high school students, she worried that students are going through school without being required to spell correctly, and some get to high school without knowing how to read.

I think they give them the opportunity for everything, with the reading at the school. I don’t think they’re, that’s why I like the open concept, I don’t think they’re bounded by a certain – we can’t go across this line of whatever. Like Mrs. Boyd saw that she was reading, Kymber was reading maybe a little better than this other child so she’s [like] “Let me get her something a little bit different, you know, that will challenge her but without let anyone in, involved know about it.” And I thought that was great. Ah... what I’m not very fond of it in the writing part and this is, this is just ... hum ... I think I was brought up to – is it sounding out a word, isn’t that phonics? (^^^) I don’t care for is ... in certain ways, and I know, when they’re smaller, I don’t have no problems with it. Sound – just writing the word as it, it sounds but it gives them a basis but I think it should be carried on, you know, like the ... to spell it correctly. (AT, Kiera’s mother, June 1999)

Kiera’s parents were aware of proficiency requirements but felt comfortable with where she was. Based on her older daughter’s school experiences, Kiera’s mother worried about children who were afraid of testing situations in which they did not do well, and how the proficiency testing will affect their future in schools and outside. Laurie’s mother, on the other hand, saw benefits in assessment requirements. She felt that proficiency tests were a good way to assess students and prevent their falling through the cracks. She had not thought much about the fourth grade proficiency test, which did not
seem to be a concern for her. She felt that her children would not have problems in the reading part.

Laurie’s mother felt that Mrs. Boyd’s large class size affected what she was able to do during the school year, especially her ability to develop more individualized projects. She was happy with Laurie’s growth on reading and writing, and her enjoyment of reading, writing and drawing activities at school and at home.

[Mrs. Boyd] had such a large class, especially this year. I think she did great for having that many kids, but I kind of wished that Laurie had been challenged more in certain areas. Given … it’s probably a lot to ask from first grade but I kind of wished Laurie had certain projects or something. I know Laurie can write (^^^) and I know Laurie likes to socialize and everything too. So maybe I’m just asking too much from first grade. (^^^) I think that maybe if the class had been smaller … probably would had been better but she came a long way in reading … and she just, she loves to read, and she loves to write and she loves to draw. (AT, Laurie’s mother, June 1998)

At the same time, Laurie’s parents felt it was important to extend their children’s school activities by working with them at home in additional math concepts, and by providing different opportunities for reading and writing (e.g. writing emails, drawing and writing stories at home, reading new books, etc.). Rather than the monthly homework assignments, Laurie’s mother felt that homework worksheets would have been more challenging to Laurie.

As in Luana’s case, Bobby and Derek’s families were also concerned with their literacy learning. Bobby and Derek were also reading at lower levels in the beginning of the school year and, in contrast to Luana, were not interested in reading books. Both children had been exposed to books by their mothers since they were babies. Derek and
Bobby were the oldest children in their family. Derek had a younger brother, and Bobby had a younger sister and a baby brother. During the school year, Derek often played computer games, followed how to books in order to build complicated cars/structures. He was involved with his church's Sunday school and Adventure club, and Cub Scouts. Bobby enjoyed arts and outdoor activities, and he was involved in bowling and baseball after school activities.

Bobby and Derek's family were both concerned with them meeting the school's curriculum and proficiency expectations, and worked closely with them in order to meet Mrs. Boyd's monthly homework schedule and other homework assignments. In the beginning of the school year, Bobby's parents were overwhelmed and surprised of how much is now expected of a first grader.

My concerns were ... how in the world are they gonna teach these kids all these things that they told me they're gonna teach them from like August, September until June? So I was just overwhelmed. As a mom, I was like “Oh my gosh,” you know. Because, I knew that I wanted be a part of it too and I wanted help him ... and there was so much and ... one of my concerns was ... umm ... was his reading because for a couple months he wasn't doing very well, and I understand that, and I know all children different develop on their own time. But at the same time, I did, you know, I wanted him to be very confident ... in himself, and I wanted to help him to be confident if I could. (AT, Bobby's mother, June 1999)

They had concerns about how reading was taught in terms of the amount of picture support that beginner books gave to Bobby. They felt that by providing too much support, they were not helping him learn to read the words.

I'd say one biggest thing ... that I've noticed the change about in the reading procedure, and I really don't disagree with it, ... and that's how they're gonna read by pictures. But – because to me it didn't seem like ... they're reading. They're looking at the pictures and kind of guessing the words... And that's my biggest beef. I don't know. (^^^) Because you're, you're guessing of the pictures,
and if you’re not right than you, you guess until you’re right. I mean, that’s the way I look at it but, you know, everybody gets their opinion. (AT, Bobby’s step-father, June 1999)
And that’s what he did, I mean he was, he was guessing. So I was just like “Oh my goodness” You know, because when we were in school, you know, you had to know your words. The pictures didn’t help you for nothing! But amazingly enough he knows, I mean, like I said, all but three words from that first page [of Mrs. Boyd’s word list]. (AT, Bobby’s step-father and mother, June 1999)

Early on in the year, Bobby’s parents tried to cover the pictures and asked him to read the print. This increased Bobby’s frustration, who complained this was not the way he read with Mrs. Boyd. During the school year, they tried to step back and support Mrs. Boyd’s literacy curriculum. Despite their busy schedule and two younger children, they made homework assignments a priority in their daily schedule. At the end of the year, Bobby reached the district’s reading proficiency level. Taking into account new pressures and proficiency expectations, the goal of Bobby’s parents was to continue to support him in getting through school. Bobby’s parents planned on working with him during the summer on reading and writing activities similar to the ones they worked throughout the school year. They felt it would help Bobby be ready for second grade.

Derek qualified for the Early Reading Initiative program offered by the district based on his beginning of the year assessment scores. Like Bobby’s parents, Derek’s parents also worked closely with him at home and early in the year had concerns about the amount of picture support given by beginner books. At the end of the year, Derek successfully met his goal of being able to read a chapter book. Derek’s mother felt that one of the best things that happened to him this year was “that throughout the course of the year he believed that he could do it” (AT, Derek’s mother, June 1999).
Early in the school year, Derek’s mother shared with Mrs. Boyd her concerns about him not passing the fourth grade reading proficiency test. Even though Derek successfully reached the district’s reading proficiency standard at the end of the school year, his mom was still concerned with the possibility of him not passing the fourth grade proficiency test.

I’m very concerned, I’ll be very honest here, I know that right now he’s like, you know, kind of the average or the passing point or just at the passing point or whatever, you know, for his grade. Right on grade level or whatever, I mean. I’d love to see him above grade level ... as a reader. I mean, I’d love to see him be an advanced reader and I hope that, and I’m not giving up that that might happen some day. (^^^) I’d like to see him just to, I don’t know how to say, have a little more of a buffer zone, I guess. So when he gets to something that becomes difficult, or he gets to next year in second grade, you know, I’d like him to start up a little ...ah ead than where he started this year in first grade, I guess. (^^^) I guess the part that – this is just a personal thing. The part that really scares me about Derek is ... that I’m not sure sometimes, ... like the standardized testing kind of thing, it’s not the kind of learner he is, so I don’t have – I’ll, I’ll be surprised if they, in my opinion, ever give a true assessment of what Derek knows and what Derek can do because a lot of what Derek can do is very ... um ... is oral and is very spatial and physical and those kinds of tests don’t test those kinds of things (^^^). [She also feels that] Derek is a very nervous child, he bites at his clothes, at his fingernails, ahm, he worries about being good at things and successful at things, I think, you know, ahm ... when it comes to a big moment, which is a test, it’s a big moment kind of thing. It’s not the everyday things. He doesn’t worry about the everyday, all the time basis. (^^^) I really worry about that [Derek taking a proficiency test]. That’s something that I worry more than anything with him is that Derek is gonna get frustrated and simply go with the “I don’t know” (AT, Derek’s mother, June 1999)

In addition, the possibility of Derek being retained in fourth grade as a result of the fourth grade reading guarantee added more stress. Like Bobby’s parents, Derek’s mother also planned on working with Derek during the summer. She aimed at helping Derek keep up
and not forget skills learned in school, and have some time to process all that he had learned. She also aimed at working on a fourth grade proficiency test pre-workbook.

My goal ... this summer is ... and we’ve – he and I talked about this, that we’re gonna spend an hour a day. We’re going to be at the shop together [their print shop], which is a good place, there’s desks and it’s a work type of environment. And Don [Derek’s younger brother] is going to be doing things too, writing his name and getting ready for kindergarten. But we’re gonna be spending an hour a day on ... on school work. And it could be: doing things on the computer, it could be reading a book, it could writing something, it could be in the math workbook, you know, it could be helping Don write his name. But collectively the three of us are gonna spend an hour a day. (^^^) [We’ve] purchased the pre-workbook [for the fourth grade proficiency test] kind of thing. So, I guess, instead of a summer where we might have spent the summer, ah, just enjoying books from the library, and maybe writing letters to grandma, and maybe writing some stories on the computer. Now part of our preparation over the summer is gonna be spent with this workbook answering multiple choice questions. (AT, Derek’s mother, June 1999)

Making sure that Derek would pass the fourth grade proficiency test was a big concern for his mother even though he still had three years to prepare for it. She worried about Derek’s being an October child, and the consequences in opportunities available at school, whether academic or in athletics, that might be affected by the possibility of retention in fourth grade because of reading.

No, I don’t feel that way [that he has three more years]. I don’t think I can. If the test was used the way it was supposed to be used. If the test was used and, and if it was something that was only to draw a red flag and say “Hey, this kid needs some help. Let’s get him some help.” Then fine. But for the test to be used to something to decide whether he continues on or not. (^^^). Now, I’m sorry that sounds like a bad thing to say but I don’t wanna take any opportunity, whether it’d be academic or whatever opportunity, away from him simply because he didn’t answer A, B or C correctly on a multiple choice test, on a given day, on one week of his life. And we don’t, we don’t take into any fact what else happened that week. Did his grandma die? Did his dog die? Does he have a cold? Does he have a fever? Does he – are his allergies bothering him? Did he not sleep well? Did the neighbors
Luana, Derek and Bobby's families were concerned with their children's reading and writing development and tried to help in the process. Their participation in this process was different, as well as, their involvement in school and classroom activities varied. Bobby's mother had two younger children and worked full time. Her husband also worked full time. Their participation involved working with Bobby at home and completing homework assignments, contact with Mrs. Boyd through written notes when needed, and participating at some of the school events such as parent information night, parent conference and student-led conference. Derek's mom was often present in the school because of her involvement with the PTA. She was also involved in their family business and on raising a younger child. Her participation involved working with Derek at home, helping out in classroom parties and field trips, participating at classroom level meetings, and organizing and participating in school events. Luana's cousin and uncle attended Mrs. Boyd's parent information night, and her cousin and grandmother participated in the student-led conference. Luana and her mother moved to a different city, where her grandmother lived, in February.

As previously described, Highwood and/or its PTA organized a variety of events in order to bring families to the school, as well as to promote opportunities for families to meet other families and school staff (e.g., Open House, the Snowball Express or Literacy night, Skating Parties, Donuts with Dad, Family Bingo Night, Muffins with Mom, Spring Festival, Field Day, etc.). According to a parent from Mrs. Boyd's classroom, who was
the PTA president, families enjoyed coming to PTA events. On the other hand, there was lack of family participation in the organization of these events and in PTA meetings. In general, the PTA was represented by eight parents who were involved in all meetings on a regular basis.

Families from Mrs. Boyd's classroom were present in school and PTA-organized events, and particularly in events organized at the classroom level that focused on student's progress or the first grade curricula. The number of families varied from event. For example, out of twenty-six families, eighteen came to the school's Open House. Fourteen families were present at Mrs. Boyd's parent information night, and eight families were present at the school's Literacy night. Over the school year Mrs. Boyd was able to meet once with all the families, except for four families who moved during the year. During student-led conference day, fourteen families were present. There was less family participation in classroom organized events such as fieldtrips, classroom parties and volunteering in the classroom. Six parents (4 mothers and 2 fathers) volunteered to help in the first field trip, and ten families helped in the second field trip (including 7 mothers, 3 fathers, and 1 grandmother). About four mothers organized two classroom parties (the Valentine and Harvest parties). About five mothers volunteered in the classroom once or twice over the school year, and one grandfather volunteered on a weekly basis for about three months.

Over the school year, a concern for Mrs. Boyd was how to encourage families to work with their children at home; that is, particularly by assisting them in homework assignments, and promoting reading and writing learning opportunities at home. With the
district’s new reading proficiency standard for first grade level and the state’s fourth grade reading guarantee, Mrs. Boyd increased the amount of homework sent home on a monthly basis, and she started to send it earlier this year. From the monthly homework calendar sent home in the beginning of the month, she received assignments from about eight children on a regular basis. In March, she started sending math worksheets, which she received from about sixteen students on a regular basis.

In short, although there were different levels of school involvement, the families showed interest and/or concern for their children’s learning. The high percentage of responses to Mrs. Boyd’s survey indicates the families’ interest in providing information, which could support their children’s first grade experience. In their expectations of Mrs. Boyd’s teaching, the explicit focus on building reading and/or writing skills was among 36% of the responses. Overall, the families’ responses focused on the development of a supportive teaching relationship to foster their children’s learning. Homevisits to five families indicate the families’ value of school literacy practices. In some cases, the families’ understanding of how literacy learning takes place varied from the school’s literature-based, integrated and developmental perspective. As described earlier, Bobby’s and Derek’s parents questioned the use of pictures to make guesses while reading a book; Luana’s mother bought phonics books to help her learn how to read and write; and Laurie’s mother felt that homework worksheets are more challenging and promote more learning. Bobby, Derek, Kiera and Laurie’s families felt that it was important to support Mrs. Boyd’s curriculum.
The families were notified of the classroom’s assessment schedule, the district’s assessment and reading standard expectations in a parent information night and parent conferences, and/or through school or classroom written notes sent home over the school year. To some extent they were aware of the implications of the state’s mandate of a fourth grade proficiency test and the fourth grade reading guarantee. Kiera’s mother and Derek’s mother openly shared their concerns about the negative consequences of holding children back based on their performance on one test. On the other hand, a larger class size, and its effect on Mrs. Boyd’s teaching, was a concern for Laurie’s mother.

So far I have described and displayed three contexts outside the classroom (the district, the school and the community and family) which informed and/or shaped the nature of literacy learning and teaching in Mrs. Boyd’s classroom. To examine the classroom context and what literacy learning and teaching looked like, in the next section, I describe the teacher, the students, and the classroom opportunities for literacy learning and teaching.

**The Classroom Context**

Here and now, place and time, refer to much more than a bounded succession of moments and the intersection of coordinates in space. They are certainly that, but they cannot be reduced to that alone. Our here and now is best thought of as the complex web of personal and temporal interactions that make up everyday life. (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p.11)

In Julie Boyd’s classroom, literacy learning and teaching was an important part of the complex web of personal and temporal interactions making up the classroom daily
life. In the classroom context, opportunities for literacy learning and teaching were situated within interactional spaces created by the teacher, students and classroom community in particular classroom spaces, materials and time.

Mrs. Boyd played a central role in the classroom context. Like a conductor, she orchestrated the course of study and assessment requirements; the school’s schedule; her students’ interests, backgrounds and needs; their families’ expectations and backgrounds; and the organization of classroom’s physical space, time and available material and human resources. This orchestration or daily decision-making process was guided by Mrs. Boyd’s “practical knowledge” (Elbaz, 1983; Dantas, Fernie & Kirschner, 1999). In other words, her frames of reference, and theoretical and practical understandings of classroom practice, child development, and learning. At the same time, in the ongoing process of curriculum enactment, the student’s frames of reference (e.g., interests, personal history and literacy background, etc.) and their responses and needs (as determined by formal and informal assessments) also played a critical role. Over the school year, Mrs. Boyd and her students became a classroom community, who shared a history and academic, social and local knowledge. Being part of a classroom community or social group involved the construction of local or situated meanings, and common knowledge of roles and relationships, rights and responsibilities, and norms and expectations of appropriate participation in the classroom (Gee & Green, 1998; Zaharlick & Green, 1991). Local and shared meanings allowed the implementation of and

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8 Frames of reference consist of personal frames (e.g., beliefs, personal history, past experiences, abilities and interests); material frames brought to the practical situation; frames constructed during her lessons (academic, social and local frames); and frames developed over the school year based on historical frames or frames of prior lessons (Green & Weade, 1987).
participation in daily or weekly classroom routines and activities (e.g., planned literacy events), and literacy and social practices. Classroom space, the daily schedule, the materials available in the classroom and new materials also influenced the construction of local meanings and opportunities for literacy learning and teaching.

Figure 4.7 displays the embeddeness of opportunities for literacy learning and teaching within interactional spaces co-constructed and framed by the teacher, students and classroom community within specific classroom spaces, materials and time.

Following, I describe the classroom context by focusing on the teacher, the students and the classroom opportunities for literacy learning and teaching. As I examine the classroom opportunities for literacy learning and teaching, I describe the classroom space, materials and schedule.
The Classroom Context

Teacher
- Theoretical and experiential knowledge
- Frames of reference
- Curriculum goals

Student(s)
- Frames of reference (e.g., personal history, abilities, etc.)

Classroom Community
- History
- Shared Knowledge of academic, social and local frames

Opportunities for Literacy Learning and Teaching

Space, Time and Materials
- Classroom space
- Daily and weekly schedule
- Materials available in the classroom (e.g., selection of children’s books)
- New materials created and/or brought to the classroom, etc.

Figure 4.7 The Classroom Context

Adapted from Weade (1992)
The Teacher

Julie Boyd is an experienced, highly skilled, and dedicated teacher. She is committed to teaching and learning as demonstrated by her primary purpose for participating in this research process that was as an opportunity to reflect on her teaching. She is also committed to learning and continuous professional development. Over the school year, she was constantly investigating new literature and instructional strategies to support her students’ learning. She worked on a Masters degree as a full time teacher, and has been actively involved in Highwood’s professional development efforts.

Mrs. Boyd is European-American and in her late forties, and she has taught for fourteen years. Highwood was her first teaching job, and where she has developed her professional career as an elementary teacher. Mrs. Boyd was a non-traditional student, who started teaching after her three children were in school. Over the past fourteen years, she has taught from kindergarten through fourth grade, although most of her teaching experience has been in kindergarten. She was in her second year as a first grade teacher. In the prior two school years, Mrs. Boyd had kept the same group of students from kindergarten to first grade.

In her teaching career, Mrs. Boyd has also been involved with the education association representing teachers in the district for different periods of time over the past ten years. She has represented Highwood in contract negotiation with the district’s administration, and she has served as a chair for the association’s Teacher Education and Professional Standards committee (TEPS).
I began by doing some work during the summer for contract language and became the rep [representative] for the building basically because no one else wanted to do it. A few years later, I was asked to serve as chair for the Teacher Education and Professional Standards committee because they knew I wasn't afraid to speak out about issues I felt strongly about. TEPS is a committee of 7 teachers representing all levels (elementary, middle and high school) and we meet with 7 of the top level administrators to discuss curriculum issues for the district. ... I have negotiated for a regular contract, serving as the elementary rep and also for split sessions. (Email communication, June 1999)

Mrs. Boyd felt that elementary teachers’ participation in the teachers’ union was very important in order to look at practices that might be working in other districts, look at problems, request better work conditions or even keep what they have fought for. Mrs. Boyd’s family was also involved in education. Her husband taught at a high school in the same district, and one of her children was an elementary teacher at a different district.

Mrs. Boyd’s personal history, and teaching and professional experiences guided her literacy curriculum and ongoing decision-making. These experiences provided frames of references as well as theoretical and experiential knowledge on the nature of literacy learning and teaching. For instance, Mrs. Boyd’s teaching and relationship with families were influenced by her personal history as a parent, including her experiences as a parent at Highwood. Mrs. Boyd’s past professional experiences (e.g., working for the post office and city library) also influenced her understanding of the school’s community and new attendance area. Her practical experiences teaching kindergarten, first, second, third and fourth grades were important sources of information throughout the school year. For example, in the beginning of the school year, she reviewed aspects of the kindergarten course of study in order to support students who were having difficulty. Over the school
year, her lessons took into account what the students would be expected to know and
learn in second grade. Mrs. Boyd's teaching was also influenced by material frames,
particularly resources available at the school. For example, having access to bookcases (in
a variety of sizes) and display boards were critical in order to create a supportive and
intimate learning environment within the school’s open space architecture. In addition,
knowledge and social roles constructed during lessons and the history of the classroom
group influenced how lessons (and units) got constructed and the directions Mrs. Boyd
took within a lesson or in future lessons, as well as in her curriculum implementation
over time.

Mrs. Boyd’s practical and theoretical understandings of literacy learning and
teaching were grounded in her teaching career at a school committed to collaboration and
a child-centered, literature-based and integrated approach to learning. She was committed
to the school’s philosophy. Like other Highwood teachers, Mrs. Boyd had been
influenced by whole language beliefs and a developmental approach to learning. As she
explained in her curriculum notes (which was distributed to families in the Open house),

Teachers at ... [Highwood] have incorporated the whole language, developmental
approach to learning for a number of years. Whole language is a way of looking at
children and how they learn. It is a set of beliefs about how children learn and its
principles and practices are firmly grounded in research from many fields ... (Curriculum
notes, August 1998)

Mrs. Boyd’s literature-based approach was guided by whole language beliefs, and
an understanding of literacy learning and teaching as best facilitated in the context of
authentic language experiences. For example, teaching skills in meaningful contexts such as through poetry, stories and informational texts. As she explained to families,

Research ... shows it is not necessary to introduce and drill words out of context, teach phonics in isolation or teach reading in a hierarchy of skills to be mastered. As children are immersed in print of all kinds and receive many demonstrations of reading, they learn the necessary skills and strategies. (Curriculum notes, August 1998)

In the classroom, she promoted a range of reading opportunities, which supported her students' word knowledge, learning of reading strategies to problem solve new text, appreciation of reading, and exposure to a variety of genres.

Children become lifelong readers through being involved in the process of reading. We read books everyday during quiet reading, during story time, and during big book instruction. We discuss reading strategies, and what to do when we come to a word the we don’t recognize. The children are given opportunities to read from a wide variety of books in the classroom and in the school library. Children can choose to read story books, poetry, songs, and informational selections from the classroom library. I also have time periods when children need to read books that they can really accomplish independently at their own reading level. During this reading group time, the children have access to a box of books at their own level. (Letter to families, September 1998)

In addition, writing was promoted through different opportunities embedded in daily classroom activities. For example, journal writing, writing science observations, math problems, thank you notes, etc. In the next section, I describe in more detail the classroom opportunities for literacy learning and teaching promoted by Mrs. Boyd. Her literacy curriculum was in agreement with the district’s recently implemented language arts course of study.
Mrs. Boyd was committed to a developmental and child-centered approach to literacy learning and teaching, which supports children's literacy development at his/her own progress and builds upon what they already know. As she described in her curriculum notes,

I gently guide children as they pretend to read and write or scribble a thought, draw an idea, share a personal experience, read a book, or sing a made-up song. Information is provided when the children are ready and in a way which makes sense for them as I build upon what your child already knows. ... All learning involves risk-taking, ongoing evaluation, and new attempts. Each child must learn at his/her own progress. I plan and commit to providing a successful learning experience for each child. I encourage and celebrate everything that takes place in the classroom. I value what each individual child knows and does ... (Curriculum notes, August 1998)

Informed by her experiences as a parent and a teacher, Mrs. Boyd believed that learning to read and write is a developmental thing, some children will be ready earlier, and others will make more growth later. As she later reinforced to families in their parent information night:

... there is some kids that by the end of first grade, they're still not going to be a strong reader. It might be second grade. When I taught second and third grade, I did have kids coming to me that were really non readers but that was the year they made the growth. So it is a developmental thing. So don’t panic. My younger son didn’t really start to read until about mid first grade and I was starting to think, “Okay, what’s wrong?” But when it came, it came, and he was fine. ... It is a developmental issue with it also. Same thing with writing. We’re writing a lot. They’re really writing on a daily basis. ... We’re encouraging the kids, you know, if they’re writing, some of the kids are still stringing letters, that’s fine. Some are getting beginning sounds, that’s fine. Some are writing words like we and the in their writing. They’re all at different stages. I kind of, I take them where they are at and we move forward. So each child when I talk to them about their writing, you know, I’ll talk to them about different things with it. (AT, Parent information night, September 1998)
Mrs. Boyd not only expected children to be at different places and to progress at different
rates but she also expected to interact with them and organize her teaching in ways
appropriate to their developmental levels. As she later explained,

My feeling about child centered is that you look at each child individually, assess
where they are, and build upon their prior knowledge. It is important the work to
be meaningful and active. Concrete materials should be used at first — moving to
the symbolic as the child is ready for it. ...
Anyway ... you help the child be successful, while, at the same time, encourage
the child to take risks to expand their knowledge. It is important to remember that
not all children learn at the same pace ... It is also important to celebrate the
growth a child makes, no matter how large or small.
What and how I teach is definitely affected by the children and the knowledge
they bring. It dictates the length of time I will spend on concepts as well as how to
introduce material, what activities to use, etc. Curriculum often drives the amount
of time one can spend in depth on a subject — there are a lot of concepts which
must be covered. (Dialogue journal, October 1998)

As stated by Mrs. Boyd, although she had to take into account children’s developmental
levels, she also had to follow the district’s curriculum in order to cover the concepts
required for first grade level in reading, writing, math, social studies, science and health.

In this sense, the content expected to be covered by the district’s course of study
(particularly in math) set limits in the amount of time she could explore particular
subjects in depth through thematic units. As Mrs. Boyd explained to me early in the
school year,

[In the past] if you did a unit on the ocean or whatever ...., you know, you felt like
that if you didn’t get to math for 3 or 4 days it wasn’t a big deal. And there is no
way that you feel now where you can [laughs], you know like — totally, you know,
not give them [math] that especially upper grades, give them math worksheets or
that type of things. With that pressure, I guess (**), you know you gotta cover,
you know gotta — it’s like getting them in these math computers ten minutes a day.
That — that takes away from the big focus — you know, focus sometimes. Because,
you know, you can be meeting, and they’ll probably say, you know, “it’s not
working right.” And you have to stop, and get up and go help them. I mean, it’s a
constant disruption with that sometimes too. (^~^). And it’s just, you know, I think it’s, you know, it’s a matter of like- I found last year some of the things that worked most successfully, I think, was picking a book or couple of books that would relate well to math also, and then really focusing on them for a week or two because there were a lot of math activities that could go along with it and that seemed to work really well with things. But, you know... before your units would have lasted for a month or six weeks or two months. But I think now, even when I had kindergarten, in the beginning of kindergarten they lasted longer. But now, it’s like, you tend to shorten them because you think “Okay, we’ve covered these concepts. Okay, now we need to cover this concept.” You know, to make sure that you’re getting all the different areas in with it. So that’s part of it. So we’re still [doing] theme, you know, but it’s not as in-depth. (AT, August 1998)

Included in Mrs. Boyd’s developmental and child-centered approach was a view of children as active learners. She tried to promote learning in a fun manner, in a lot of different ways, and through active involvement.

I realize children need to be involved in many various experiences to promote learning and that not all children learn in the same way. I try to include activities which involve them actively – especially since primary kids are so very active! (Dialogue journal, October 1998)

As Mrs. Boyd explained to families in their parent information night, children need repetition and their learning of a new concept will occur when they’re exposed to it in a lot of different ways. Nevertheless, this repetition may take place through what children conceive as play.

They’re active. They’ll be active learners (. ) With the math or any concept, they need to have it a lot of different ways.... It’s not just giving to them in one way and expecting them to learn it. We do lots of things, lots of different ways and over and over. .... So we’ll do things over and over and over. And they don’t realize lots of times that, you know, what they’re doing like, they don’t understand that when we’re doing this, it’s math. We’re doing patterns, we’ve counted, we’ve counted by twos and fives or threes. ... We’ve been in school for sixteen days now and ... we went through some additions and facts with the six ... It’s a constant learning but they just, don’t see it. They think it’s play and they’ll probably come home and tell you, “We play a lot.” But it’s not just, there is
learning going on through that play. (AT, Parent information night, September 1998)

Following the school’s theme-based approach to learning, Mrs. Boyd also believed in an integrated curriculum. The thematic units integrated part of the content expected in the language arts and math course of study, and the content expected for social studies, science and health. She first explained it to the students’ families in her classroom curriculum notes:

Other areas of the curriculum [science, social studies and health] are taught through our integrated units and the literature used daily in the classroom. For example, an objective from social studies is careers which can be incorporated when discussing who helps us around the school. Our day is not broken into different parts just as life is not broken into parts. (Curriculum notes, August 1998)

Mrs. Boyd also explained to families in a parent information night that although they did not have a specific time allocated to science, social studies or health, these content areas were integrated through the thematic units implemented over the school year.

[Writing] and reading and math are probably, those are the ones I’ll really … focus on a lot … Obviously, we’re doing some science things. The kids are going to be doing some observations, science gets in. We do have social studies and health. We talked about the ladybugs came from California [as part of their first unit, Insects]. So we got out the map and we talked about where California was, and here is Ohio, and, you know, we’ll talk about the directions and things like that with it. So everything (.) … blends into that moment of things. … But we don’t get out a social studies book and say, “Okay, this is social studies or this is science.” And we’re going to learn about ladybugs. … We’ve talked about that [facts about insects], … we’ve drew some pictures of it, we repeated it. … That’s our science right now. … We’re going to learn about, by watching the ladybugs and the butterflies, about their habitat and where they live. … We’re getting ready to do, with the caterpillars, I have a butterfly [notebook], it’s the shape of a butterfly and they’re going to do like weekly observations, like every 2 or 3 days observations of the butterfly. So they’ll bring that home to you at the end, and you can see how the caterpillars have changed to the chrysalis and to the butterfly. (AT, Parent information night, September 1998)
Mrs. Boyd saw as an advantage that the district’s course of study allowed them to teach whatever themes they wanted to:

We are fortunate to be able to take the course of study and use whatever themes we want to teach the different objectives. There are suggestions given and some are the best way to teach that particular objective. One of the science objectives is change and we have been observing change [in our snow and penguins units] through the exploration of water changing to ice and back again. We have also been discussing what a food chain is and upsetting the balance of nature through some of the books we are reading about penguins. (Dialogue journal, February 1999)

In her selection of themes for the units implemented, Mrs. Boyd took into account themes which (1) allowed the integration of the district’s language arts, math, science, social studies and health course of study for first grade level (and built upon content expected for the fourth grade proficiency test); (2) supported her students’ interests and background knowledge; (3) took advantage of resources available and the time of the year or seasons; and (4) involved a sense of continuity and the ability to link content between the units implemented (for example, see appendix I for a copy of Mrs. Boyd’s reflections on her planning for the Dinosaur unit). Mrs. Boyd did not have a pre-defined list of units that she would implement during the year. For example, the choice of their first unit, Insects, was influenced by children’s interest on insects in the first couple days of school, and because of the time of the year (fall), which was good for observing and finding insects. Some of the units she implemented for the first time (e.g., Insects), other units she had implemented in the prior school year (e.g., Snow) or a few years ago (e.g., Dinosaurs). Over the school year, she implemented ten units that varied in length and how much they were able to integrate the content areas. The topics of these units were: Insects, Shapes,
Harvest, Gingerbread Boy Variations, Snow, Penguins, Cats, Dinosaurs, Rainforest and Plants.

Mrs. Boyd supported the school’s mission of developing a community of lifelong learners, and aimed to promote her students’ independence as learners. As she reinforced to families:

They should be able to be independent in that sense that they’re able to work things through and do things without really relying on me. And that’s our goal too: It’s to make them independent and lifelong learners ... (AT, Parent information night, September 1998)

As literacy goals, Mrs. Boyd aimed to build in her students confidence as readers and writers. She defined supporting literacy learning as goal 1 for her required school/district goals and objectives for the school year:

Goal 1: To create a classroom environment that continues to support children as readers and writers.
Objective 1: To continue to learn about emergent literacy. ... 
Objective 2: To incorporate the concepts of ELLI on a daily basis. ... 
Objective 3: To include more songs and poetry. ...

Mrs. Boyd’s objectives for goal 1 included different forms of professional development to improve her understanding of literacy learning and teaching. Her major interest in participating in this study was to have new opportunities to reflect on her literacy teaching as a way of improving it.

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9 All teachers at Highwood were required to write goals and objectives for the school year. Two goals should address student achievement, and a third could be a personal goal. They met individually with the principal to discuss them. Mrs. Boyd’s wrote two goals that focused on two areas: literacy and math.
Mrs. Boyd aimed at getting her students as far as possible considering that they will be retained if they do not pass their fourth grade reading proficiency test. As she explained to families,

Learning to read this year is an important issue. (AT, Parent information night, September 1998)

In January, during the school’s Literacy night or the Snowball Express, Mrs. Boyd specified to families the district’s reading expectations for first grade level:

... By the end of the year ..., I just wanted to share this with you. The children are expected to be able to read like a level 14. And if we say that to you or whatever, you may say “what do you mean by a level 14?” Goodnight Moon [Brown, 1997] is the book that, by the end of the year, expectations are, you know, hopefully the children will be able to read. We know that not everyone will be here. It’s our goal to move your children as far, as long as we can with it. It’s a big goal. ... Next year they’re increasing it even, ah, two more levels in the book. So it makes it even more difficult. So it’s all part of getting ready for the proficiency test thing. So this is just to give you an idea of what books ... and there’s like, that blue tub up there has a lot of like those leveled books, and if you wanna a chance just to look through it ... (AT, January 1999)

As Mrs. Boyd shared with the families, she realized that meeting the district’s reading standard was a big goal. She had concerns about the new reading proficiency standard at level 14 for first graders, which will increase to level 16 the next school year. Mrs. Boyd felt that if students have a solid basic knowledge, they would continue to grow. On the other hand, she worried that although students are expected to come to first grade at level 4, out of a starting group of twenty-six students she only had six students at or above this level. She felt that the district was expecting 10 up, difficult levels, in addition to expecting teachers to work with a large classroom size. At the same time,
taking into account students who were below grade level expectations in the beginning of
the school year and did not view themselves as readers or writers, Mrs. Boyd's basic goal
was "just to get a good sense of where the kids are at, and to move them along, not to
push them where they gonna get so bogged down" (AT, August 1998). Building their
confidence as readers and writers was a central part of this process.

Mrs. Boyd also had concerns about the district's criteria for determining writing
proficiency at first grade level. She had found that students who write wonderful stories
but did not put a period or might mix up lower and upper case letters will get a lower
score or the same score of a child who wrote "I like the dog. I like the cat. It is black. It is
white. Four sentences, on the topic, capital letters, period, nice and neat" (AT, August
1998). She worried that students who have written more elaborate stories are
downgraded; on the other hand, if they spell everything correctly, they are considered
good writers.

Taking into account the district's standards for reading and writing proficiency,
the level of family involvement was a concern for Mrs. Boyd. She tried to find ways to
encourage families to participate in their children's learning. She believed that parent
involvement was critical for students' success in school.

Parents do need to participate in their child's learning if a child is to have a better
chance of being successful. (Dialogue journal, November 1998)

In the beginning of the school year, she organized a parent information night for
her students' families. The purpose of this meeting was to explain to families "more
about the first grade program, its curriculum and expectations" (Letter to families,
September 1998). Every Friday Mrs. Boyd sent a weekly letter to families called “Ask Me About” (copy in Appendix E). The purpose of this letter was to inform families of the various activities that took place in the classroom during the week, and of upcoming events. This letter provided families with ongoing information of their weekly classroom activities to keep them updated about their children’s learning as well as their classroom schedule (i.e., special events, assessment schedule, etc.). From September until their Spring break, Mrs. Boyd included in this letter a list of five new words every week. She asked families to study these words with their children.

Mrs. Boyd sent home a monthly homework calendar in the beginning of each month which listed important dates in the classroom, and assignments for families to do with their children at home (copy in Appendix F). In comparison to the prior year, she started to send homework assignments earlier this year because of the district’s new reading proficiency standard. In these homework assignments, families were asked to work with their children on reading, writing and math concepts that they were working in the classroom (e.g., practice writing their names on upper and lower case letters; writing the ABC’s, reading and writing high frequency words; letter formation; writing numbers to 100; cutting shapes out of colored paper; etc.). For example,

Write the words of the week [boy, could, don’t, girl, and good] two times each. Can you think of a sentence for each word? (Monthly homework calendar, February 1999)

Mrs. Boyd included activities that would involve resources easily available to families:

How many days are there in October? Make a collection of that many items (pennies, cereal, etc.). Put them into piles of 10. How many piles do you have? Are there any left over? ... Make a list of the names of every person in your
family. Whose name has the most letters? Whose name has the least? Cut the names apart and put them in order from least to most. (Monthly homework calendar, October 1998)

She tried to include families in school literacy activities by organizing a classroom recipe book.

Help your mom or dad tonight so that they have time to write down a family recipe to bring to school by Friday. (Monthly homework calendar, December 1998)

On a weekly basis, Mrs. Boyd tried to send home a book bag with a book at each student’s independent reading level. In September, she sent a letter explaining to families the purpose of the book bag, and she attached a handout with suggestions of reading strategies to use when listening to a child read:

Your child will be bringing home a book today at their own independent level. Please read this book everyday with your child. I realize that you are busy, but please have your child read his/her book everyday. Your child and I will be choosing the titles together, and the book titles will change every week.

(Letter to families, September 1998)

In October, Mrs. Boyd also sent home a list of 179 high frequency words. As she explained to families,

Because so many of you are interested in helping your child at home, I have attached a list of all the high frequency words. By the end of first grade, students should be able to identify at least 100 of these words. The students need to be able to spell this list of words correctly, identify them in their reading, and write them correctly by the end of second grade. Teaching these words is not an easy task. Most of the words have no concrete meaning and many share the same letters. We will add five or six of these words to our word wall at school each week. I will include the words on which we will be focusing each week in the “Ask Me About” so you know which words to help your child with at home. The children will not be “tested” on these words but should be using them and spelling them correctly in their work. Please help your
child at home as much as possible with the words we are adding each week. Practicing these words will benefit your child as he/she develops into a life-long reader and writer. (Letter to families, October 1998)

Mrs. Boyd also sent to families a handout, and an attached letter, on verbal directions for the correct formation of letters during handwriting.

As mentioned earlier, as a schoolwide practice, Mrs. Boyd met with each family individually at least once during the school year. In addition to parent conferences, she organized student-led conferences in February. This was Mrs. Boyd’s second year doing student-led conferences. She felt that it was important despite the time needed out of their daily schedule to prepare for it. Mrs. Boyd met with each student individually to select examples she had gathered of their work for a “showcase portfolio.” She met twice with each student: first for the selection of work pieces and for writing a short note on why they selected each piece, and second to set goals for reading, writing and math for the rest of the school year (see examples of materials used for the student-led conferences in Appendix J). For Mrs. Boyd,

One of the best things about student-led conferences is working with the children 1-1 - getting a chance to talk to them about their work and helping them see the changes that have taken place so far during the year. Obviously is not an easy process to do when you are in the room by yourself but we got through it. I did show a couple of movies last week - 30 minutes in length. It was a necessity in many ways - it allowed me to have at least that time uninterrupted to work with two or more children. ...

It is always nice to hear the children use some of the language you are really trying to get them to pick up on like sorting the candies by color or remembering that expand means getting bigger. ...

... I think it is good for the children to see that many of the things we are doing now is built upon the knowledge they have previously learned. (Dialogue journal, February 1999)
She felt the students took ownership in the process. She viewed as benefits of a student-led conference that it provided an opportunity for families to celebrate the successes of their children, to understand their areas of difficulty, and set goals for the rest of the school year and discuss steps to help them achieve more successes (Letter to families, January 1999). Mrs. Boyd scheduled the student-led conferences for a Saturday morning so that more families could attend. The students took the lead in the process, and Mrs. Boyd circulated in the room and answered questions as needed.

Conferences, portfolios and students progress reports were authentic forms of assessment of students' growth used by Mrs. Boyd to provide information not only to families but also to the students about their progress. Mrs. Boyd also informally assessed her students' growth and progress through ongoing classroom level observations and one-on-one interactions. Mrs. Boyd used informal and formal forms of assessment to inform and plan her individualized and whole group instruction, to make decisions about the need of intervention services, and to report to families. Included in Mrs. Boyd's formal assessments were the students' progress report, the district's benchmarks in reading, writing and math, and the district's CBE testing. She was required to send her students' progress report home every nine weeks, and to complete the student's district benchmarks at least twice annually. Mrs. Boyd had to administer the CBE testing for reading, writing and math in the beginning and end of the school year. Although Mrs. Boyd had concerns about the district's proficiency standards for reading and writing, she saw the CBE testing as helpful in that now Maple Grove School District has district-wide standards, and teachers have a common language to describe their students.
It is helpful in a lot of ways because we struggled for years to find an even ground, a standard for each grade. We tried to do it within ourselves for a long time, and now it’s district-wide. It makes a lot of sense because if you say that a child is at level four, than everybody now has a good sense of what you mean instead of talking about specific books. (AT, August 1998)

In sum, Julie Boyd’s literacy curriculum was guided by her frames of reference, and theoretical and experiential knowledge on the nature of literacy learning and teaching, as well as her curriculum goals for the school year (figure 4.8). In other words, her personal history as a parent and as a long-time resident in the city in which the school is located informed her interactions with her students and their families. Mrs. Boyd’s history as a teacher at Highwood and her commitment to a child-centered, literature-based and integrated curriculum supported her implementation of the school’s philosophy. Her fourteen years of teaching were guided by a literature-based, developmental and integrated approach to literacy learning and teaching, which was in agreement with the state’s and district’s recent language arts course of study. Family involvement was an important issue for Mrs. Boyd, who tried to promote opportunities for families to participate in their children’s learning that far exceeded the twelve hours the district allocated for conferences. She had concerns about the district’s reading and writing proficiency standards for first grade level although she perceived district-wide standards as beneficial for teachers’ communication within the district. Informal and formal forms of assessment were an important part of Mrs. Boyd’s curriculum.
Theoretical and Experiential Knowledge
- child-centered and developmental approach
- literature-based approach and focus on authentic language experiences
- theme-based or integrated approach
- use of formal and informal forms of assessment, including authentic assessment
- understanding of children as active learners
- supporting new learning through exposure and repetition in a lot of different ways
- collaborative perspective (community of learners at the classroom and school level)
- 14 years of teaching experience at different grade levels in Highwood Elementary
- concerns with the district's writing rubric criteria and reading proficiency standard based on her prior experiences

Personal Frames of Reference
- insider in the community (24 years living in the community)
- parent
- active participation in the teachers' education association for Maple Grove School District

Stated Curriculum Goals
- supporting children as readers and writers
- promoting independence as life-long learners
- covering the district’s reading, writing, math, science, social studies and health course of study
- meeting the district’s reading and writing proficiency standards
- promoting family involvement
- continuous professional development

Figure 4.8 Summary of Julie Boyd's Theoretical and Experiential knowledge, Personal Frames of Reference, and Stated Curriculum Goals

The Students

Mrs. Boyd started the school year with a group of 26 students, and ended the year with a group of 23 students. This was an unusual year for Mrs. Boyd. Five students moved at different times over the year, and three new students entered the school in the middle of the year. A total of 27 students participated in this study (table 4.1). I did not obtain permission from two families. Among the 27 students, twenty-one had been in Highwood since kindergarten, one student had been retained in first grade, and six students were new to the school. All students, except for one, were six years old when
school started. The students ranged in age from 5 years, 11 months to 7 years, 7 months. There were 13 boys and 14 girls. Of the 27 students, 23 were of European-American ethnicity, 3 were African-American, and 1 was Bi-racial. Teachers at Highwood tried to group African-American students in the same classroom in order to support their process of adaptation since the school population was predominantly European-American. Except for one student, Mrs. Boyd had all the African-American students in first grade. Out of the large group, seven students were selected as focal students 10: Kiera, Laurie, Bobby, Alice, Juanita, Luana and Derek. As described earlier, homevisits were made to Kiera, Laurie, Bobby, Luana, and Derek’s houses.

In this section, I briefly describe the students' literacy backgrounds and literacy learning experiences in the classroom. I display Luana’s experiences in the classroom to illustrate how her frames of reference influenced her interactions and participation. In the next chapter (chapter 5), I examine in more detail the story of one focal student, Derek. Considering the scope of this dissertation, I decided to focus on only one focal student.

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10 See description of the criteria used to select focal students in chapter 3.
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Table 4.1  The Students' Age, Sex and Ethnicity

The majority of the students had positive feelings about school. Based on their families' response to Mrs. Boyd's survey (see figure 4.6, p.135), 77% of the students enjoyed school. In the beginning of the school year, the students seemed interested and excited about school particularly about making new friends and being with their peers. Outside recess and free choice time were among the students' favorite activities. During

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11 Juanita moved in October; Luana, Alice and Shelly moved in the winter; Ellen moved in May; and Kristen and Kevin entered the school in the winter.
12 Ellen, Alice, Juanita, Luana and Joe's ages are approximations.
free choice time, housekeeping and math tubs (especially the legos) were the top choices. Housekeeping and math tubs continued to be favorite activities for most students over the school year.

According to the families’ response to Mrs. Boyd’s survey, some students (23%) had concerns about school. Their concerns included being apprehensive about making new friends; missing playtime; seeing school as boring; being discouraged for not remembering instructions, and being insecure about reading abilities. In the first days of school, some students shared their concern about not knowing how to read and write. As illustrated in episode 4.1 below, during the early assessments, Mrs. Boyd tried to reinforce that it was okay not knowing how to read or write because that was why they were in school for.

Episode 4.1  (FN and AT, August 1998)
Mrs. Boyd (MB) explains to her first group of students what they will be doing during their first day of school. It is their first meeting of the day. Mrs. Boyd explains that they will be asked to read and to write some words with her or two other adults. Nathan quickly informs Mrs. Boyd,
Nathan               I don't know how to read
MB                    Do you know what Nathan? That’s okay. That’s why you’re here for, isn’t it? That’s why you’re here for [MB addresses all students] (^_^)

The students’ literacy backgrounds varied. As assessed by the district’s competency-based education (CBE) testing in the first days of school, the students’ prior knowledge of letters and words, ability to hear and record sounds in words and to write on a pre-defined topic, and text reading involved a wide range of levels (see Fall scores in table 4.2 below). As previously described, the CBE testing included (1) four components
of the Observation Survey (Clay, 1993b) — letter identification, writing vocabulary, hearing and recording sounds in words or dictation, and text reading; and (2) the district’s writing rubric. The majority of the students knew at least 30 or more letters in the alphabet. Students’ writing vocabulary ranged from 1 known word to 23 known words. Most students knew how to spell correctly less than 10 words. The students’ ability to hear and record sounds in words based on a dictated sentence also varied. From a total of 37 sounds, students’ responses varied from 1 sound to 36 sounds recorded correctly. Ten students only recorded correctly ten or less sounds. Twenty children read below level 4, which was the level expected for students to be reading at the beginning of first grade.

The students’ writing samples were collected in their fourth week of school. At that time, based on Mrs. Boyd’s evaluation, the writing of 16 students received a 1-point response. Based on the district’s writing rubric criteria (see figure 4.3, p.109), their score meant that they understood that language can be written; their message involved one word labels or simple words; their writing may or may not be recognized as real letters and may be anywhere on the page; they scribbled or drew pictures; and/or they lacked knowledge of relationship between letters and sounds.
Table 4.2 The Students’ Scores on District-wide Reading and Writing Assessments

Based on this early assessment, 8 children were selected for the Early Reading Initiative (ERI) program (Tyler, Nathan, Jack, John, Katia, Craig, Ryan, and Derek), and 3 students for the Reading Recovery program (Juanita and Shelley for the individual program, and Luana for the group program). During the year, as some students moved or were discontinued from intervention services, other students were selected (e.g., Alice)

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13 These are Mrs. Boyd’s scoring of the students’ writing samples, which were later scored by a second reader (and in some cases, a third reader) in the district.

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and Kevin for the Reading Recovery program, and Diane and Edward for the ERI program).

At the end of the school year, the students’ scores in the district’s CBE testing indicated growth in their ability to identify letters, hear and record sounds, and write a story about animals, as well as in their knowledge of words and their reading levels (see Spring scores in table 4.2). Out of 23 students, 14 were at or above the district’s reading proficiency standards (level 14) and 16 were considered proficient in their writing by Mrs. Boyd. Eleven students’ writing samples were also scored by a third reader, and in the district’s final writing rubric scores, 14 students were considered proficient.

The students’ CBE testing scores provide a brief picture of what they were able to read and write independently at a particular testing situation. Although informative for instructional purposes, they do not reveal the role that literacy had in students’ lives and social contexts. According to their families’ response to Mrs. Boyd’s survey (see figure 4.6, p.135), liking to read, enjoying learning, reading, writing, computer skills, building things, singing, acting out movies, making up stories and art skills were among some of the students’ strengths and interests. These strengths and interests indicate some of students’ ways of being literate, their “ways of using language” (Gee, 1989) and behaving within their family context. These strengths and interests were used as frames of reference in their interactions in the classroom, and participation in literacy practices. The students’ home experiences, personal history and interests, prior school experiences, understanding of school expectations, and learning expectations and goals were all frames of reference used in their classroom experiences.
For example, Luana enjoyed interacting and talking with classmates, particularly a group of four girls. Singing was an important part of her play. For example, early in the school year, during quiet work time, Luana developed tunes to go along with words (a, is, I, go and to) she had to stamp on a piece of paper (FN, September 1998). She sang and danced while stamping the letters of each word. The videocamera and tape recorder were often used as audience for her singing. Luana was also very interested in learning how to write and read. As her family put it, “My child’s major strengths is she’s ready and willing. She’s very eager to learn” (Response to Parent Survey, August 1998).

This was Luana’s first year at Highwood and her prior school experiences appeared to be in a more traditional school setting and literacy program. As mentioned earlier, at home Luana’s mother started using phonics books to help her learn how to read and write. These experiences influenced Luana’s participation in the classroom. During classroom work assignments involving writing, she worked hard in her letter formation. Early in the school year, she often practiced letter formation and re-writing known words or sentences (e.g., “I see red” and “I see hat”) during free choice time. Luana showed a lot of frustration when asked to write about a new topic, especially for not knowing how to write words correctly and not feeling comfortable trying to sound them out. She cried and interrupted writing when Mrs. Boyd asked students to independently work on their writing samples for the fall writing rubric assessment. Erasing attempts to write words, re-writing, feeling frustrated, repeating the same known words in different writing pieces (e.g., see and like), and constantly asking for help were characteristics of Luana’s early process of writing in the classroom. She seemed more comfortable doing writing
assignments that involved handwriting, and copying words or sentences. During quiet reading, she also often felt frustrated when not knowing how to read a word correctly and her first strategy was to ask for help. On the other hand, she enjoyed sharing her known words or sentences as well as reading known books or telling a story based on the pictures to an adult.

Over the first part of the school year (Luana moved to a different state in February), Luana became more willing to take risks in her writing. She was aware that Mrs. Boyd would not help unless she tried first. Erasing attempts frequently (because they were not the correct spelling) and the repetition of known words were still features of her writing process. Nevertheless, her writing showed attempts to sound out new words and develop longer sentences. For example, after making tiny snowmen from playdough, Mrs. Boyd asked the students to write directions on how to make a snowman. Luana wrote a dialogue between a mother, and two sisters. Although she did not follow Mrs. Boyd’s directions, she made attempts to sound out unknown words such as can, help, said, two and sister.

Ktoe [Can] I Motb [help]
You No Siet [said]
mom Ktoe [Can] I
Mot [help] You Soter [sister] No
Stei [said] the to [two]
Soter [sister] No.

(Luana’s classroom writing, February 1999)
Luana's dialogue resembles the story of a book, *The Biggest, Best Snowman* (Cuyler, 1998), Mrs. Boyd had used in shared reading time. Luana’s writing illustrates how literacy learning was embedded in classroom experiences (e.g., planned literacy events such as shared reading, interactive writing and guided groups), which were used as local frames of reference in students’ writing and reading.

During the school year, literacy learning was also interwoven in the students’ classroom interactions and play. In addition to being involved in variety of planned literacy events (as I describe in the next section), students used literacy in their play and process of developing friendships in the classroom. For example, early in the school year, many students enjoyed playing “hangman.” As illustrated in episode 4.2, they used known words and words available in the classroom (e.g., poem charts, name tags of tubs, and books) as prompts.

Episode 4.2 (FN, September 1998)

It is quiet work time in the afternoon period. Bobby, Karla and Ellen have finished their work assignments, and they are playing hangman. They are sitting on the floor close to the meeting area, and they each have a small white board, a marker and an old sock [to erase their writings and drawings]. They take turns, each having a chance to write a word on their white boards for another child to guess. I sit next to them. Ellen asks me to guess a word. She draws gallows and three dashes underneath it [for the word *cat*]. Karla tries to help by telling me the letters that I should say to Ellen. Later, Karla and Bobby take a turn. Karla selects the word *dad* for me to guess. Bobby looks around the classroom before asking me to make guesses. He draws gallows and writes four dashes underneath it [for the word *were*]. He keeps looking at a poem chart where he found the word *were* as I make attempts to guess the letters.

Overtime more sophisticated literate practices became embedded in the students’ “social worlds” (Dyson, 1993). For example, in their last day of school, Laurie and Tracy
were fascinated about a letter they had found in the housekeeping area (episode 4.3). They took the role of "detectives" to investigate the so-called mystery of who was the author of the letter.

Episode 4.3  (FN, June 1999)

It is field day and the last day of school. It is free choice time, and the students are playing in different areas of classroom while waiting for the school's field day activities to begin. Laurie and Tracy play in the housekeeping area. They are in the doll house. I stop by and ask what they are doing. They explain that they are trying to find out who sent a letter with drawings of Pooh to Sandy. Tracy shows me two maps they each have been drawing with the location of the children (Kiera, Sandy, Kim, Bobby and Kevin) who are playing close to the doll house. They are also copying in separate papers all the words in Sandy's letter. They explain that these are their clues to find out who wrote it. ... Later, Tracy calls me to show that they discovered who wrote it. She and Laurie shows me that they found Kim's name, which was covered with a sticker, but was still somewhat visible in reverse [miK yd] from the back side of the paper.

Laurie and Tracy's "detective" play followed a mystery theme popular in their selection of chapter books to read. Although they could have asked Sandy who had given her the letter, they decided to role play detectives which involved drawing maps, copying words, close analysis of Kim's writing, and developing a mystery story.

During the school year, the students' participation in planned literacy events was extended by the nature of their friendships and play. Students helped each other in completing classroom activities or work assignments. In some cases, they helped each other by explaining what to do. In other cases, they worked together by brainstorming ideas, writing about a common topic, copying an answer, or jointly reading a book. At times and depending on work assignments, Mrs. Boyd assigned seats in order to separate some students and get them to better focus on their work. Despite assigned seats,
socializing and interacting with students sitting close by was still for many students a major focus while completing work assignments.

Competition was also part of students’ friendships and classroom interactions. Finishing up work assignments first was important for many students. Being able to read a chapter book also became an important sign of status within the students’ “peer culture” (Corsaro, 1985) starting in the middle of the school year. According to Derek’s mother, “To him, those were real books too. They’re not those little baby books” (AT, June 3, 1999). In January, only a few students were able to read a chapter book. In the student-led conferences in February, many students who did not know how to read a chapter book established it as a goal to accomplish over the rest of the school year.

In reading, I would like to get better at...
“knowing more words — reading chapter books” (Bobby)
“reading some beginning chapter books” (Karla)
“reading beginning chapter books” (Kim)
“reading beginning chapter books” (Tracy)
“reading chapter books” (Derek)
“reading harder books — like chapter books” (Craig)
(Student-led Conference documents, February 1999)

Later in the school year, many students were proud to share that they were able to read a chapter book (episode 4.3). One book, More Spaghetti, I Say! (Gelman, 1993) was defined by some students as a chapter book. Although it is a level 11 book, the layout of the cover page and the size of the book resemble more advanced books like Sarah Plain and Tall (MacLachlan, 1985).

\[14\] As defined by the Reading Recovery program 1996-97 booklist.
Episode 4.3 (FN, May 1999)

It is quiet reading time in the afternoon period. Students read in the meeting area or at some of the tables. I sit at a desk close to the meeting area. Derek comes by. “I’m reading chapters now ... I finished one yesterday,” he proudly informs me. Derek shows me the book, *Ghosts Don’t Eat Potato Chips* (Dadey & Thornton, 1992), he has just finished reading. Tyler joins us, and tells me that he has read it too. I ask them what is the story about. They take turns and interrupt each other telling bits and pieces of the story of a ghost who likes to eat potato chips. Derek shows me a new chapter book that he is going to read. ... Later, Kristen tells me that she can read chapter books, and asks if she can read it to me. She reads *More Spaghetti, I Say!* (Gelman, 1993). Craig stops and picks up *Ghosts Don’t Eat Potato Chips*. He proudly tells me that he is reading chapter books now.

In sum, the students started school with a range of literacy backgrounds and ways of using language within their social contexts. As assessed by the district’s CBE testing, a large number of students were below the reading level expected at the beginning of first grade. Students were exposed to range of literacy experiences in the classroom (e.g., planned literacy events), which were used as local frames of reference while completing work assignments (e.g., Luana’s writing based on book read aloud by Mrs. Boyd).

Literacy learning was also extended by the nature of their play and friendships. In the next section, I describe in more detail the range of opportunities for literacy learning and teaching available in the classroom.

**Classroom Opportunities for Literacy Learning and Teaching**

Throughout the school year, classroom opportunities for literacy learning and teaching were embedded within the daily interactions of classroom members. Opportunities for literacy learning and teaching took place in the literacy practices used in classroom routines and ongoing interactions among classroom members. That is, daily or
weekly classroom routines provided a range of opportunities for students to learn about language structure, conventions, style and/or genre, as well as to develop reading and writing skills and strategies, and to construct meaning in meaningful and authentic experiences.

Classroom routines involved planned literacy events, planned math events, and planned and informal social routines (figure 4.9). The framework of planned classroom routines was shaped by Julie Boyd’s theoretical and experiential knowledge, frames of reference and curriculum goals, as well as the district’s course of study and assessment requirements. Informal social routines were part of the students’ “peer culture life” (Corsaro, 1985). ¹⁵

As illustrated in figure 4.9, planned literacy events, planned math events, and planned and informal social routines involved consistent patterns of organization defined by the characteristics of interactional spaces created. In other words, these routines involved the participation of a particular number of classroom members following specific “interactional norms” (Cochran-Smith, 1984), in a particular physical space(s) in the classroom, in a particular time(s) of the day, and with specific materials and purpose. As described in figure 4.9, classroom routines varied in terms of who initiated and carried them out, their location, and the configuration of the participants.

¹⁵ The students’ peer culture life is defined as informal social routines because they involved “a set of common activities or routines, artifacts, values, concerns, and attitudes” (Corsaro, 1985, p.171), which were initiated and established by the students.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Opportunities/Classroom Routines</th>
<th>Characteristics of Interactional Spaces</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planned Literacy Events</strong></td>
<td><strong>- Teacher or child initiated; Teacher-led; Whole group; Meeting area.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Shared reading</td>
<td><strong>- Teacher initiated; Teacher-led; Whole group; Meeting area.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Interactive writing</td>
<td><strong>- Teacher initiated; Teacher-led; Small groups or one-on-one interaction with the teacher; Reading table.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reading groups</td>
<td><strong>- Teacher or child initiated; Teacher or child led; Independent reading, peer reading or one-on-one interaction with the teacher; Assigned or self-selected location.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Silent reading (including listening center and computer programs)</td>
<td><strong>- Teacher or child initiated; Teacher and/or child led; Independent writing, peer writing or one-on-one interaction with the teacher; Assigned of self-selected location.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Independent writing (and drawing)</td>
<td><strong>- Teacher initiated; Teacher and/or child led; Small groups; Assigned or self-selected location.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Group Projects</td>
<td><strong>- Teacher initiated; Teacher-led; Whole group, small groups, independent work or one-on-one interactions with the teacher; Assigned location.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Formal assessment.</td>
<td><strong>- Teacher initiated; Teacher-led; Whole group, small groups, independent work or one-on-one interactions with the teacher; Assigned location.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planned Math Events</strong></td>
<td><strong>- Teacher initiated; Teacher-led; Whole group; Meeting area.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Calendar</td>
<td><strong>- Teacher initiated; Teacher-led; Whole group and/or small groups; Meeting area and self-selected location.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Group problem solving</td>
<td><strong>- Teacher initiated; Child and computer led; Independent work; Math computers area.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Math computer</td>
<td><strong>- Teacher initiated; Teacher and/or child led; Independent work; Assigned or self-selected location.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Independent math assignments</td>
<td><strong>- Teacher or child initiated; Child and computer led; Independent play or peer playing; Computers area.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Computer games</td>
<td><strong>- Teacher initiated; Teacher or child led; Whole group or one-on-one interactions; Reading table or meeting area.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planned Social Routines and Practices</strong></td>
<td><strong>- Teacher initiated; Teacher and/or child led; Independent reading; Entry display board.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Attendance and lunch count</td>
<td><strong>- Teacher initiated; Teacher or child led; Whole group; Classroom area.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Identification cards for math computers</td>
<td><strong>- Teacher initiated; Teacher or child led; One-on-one interactions.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Directions for quiet work time</td>
<td><strong>- Teacher initiated; Teacher and child led; Whole group; Meeting area.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Clean up</td>
<td><strong>- Teacher initiated; Teacher and child led; Whole group; Meeting area.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Distribution of take home folders</td>
<td><strong>- Teacher initiated; Teacher and child led; Individual work; Self-selected location.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Distribution of handouts for work assignments</td>
<td><strong>- Teacher or child initiated; Teacher or child led; Whole group, independent reading or peer reading; Entry display board.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Organizing the students’ folders or files</td>
<td><strong>- Teacher initiated; Teacher or child led; Independent reading; Entry display board.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Checking responsibility chart and morning quiet work choice chart</td>
<td><strong>- Teacher initiated; Teacher or child led; Individual work; Self-selected location.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Checking morning quiet work choice chart</td>
<td><strong>- Teacher initiated; Teacher or child led; Individual work; Self-selected location.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Writing personal cards</td>
<td><strong>- Teacher initiated; Teacher or child led; Whole group and/or independent work; Meeting area and self-selected location.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informal Social Routines (Peer culture)</strong></td>
<td><strong>- Child initiated; Child led; Small groups or one-on-one interactions; Self-selected location.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Games (hangman; guess the word; cards)</td>
<td><strong>- Child initiated; Child led; Small groups or one-on-one interactions; Self-selected location.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sharing new books and other written materials</td>
<td><strong>- Child initiated; Child led; Small groups or one-on-one interactions; Self-selected location.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Writing and/or drawing (e.g., names, cards, stories, and telephone numbers)</td>
<td><strong>- Child initiated; Child led; Small groups or one-on-one interactions; Self-selected location.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.9 Representational Map of the Patterns of Organization of Classroom Opportunities for Literacy Learning and Teaching

1 All planned literacy events (except reading groups and formal assessment) integrated arts and the district's math, social studies, science and health course of study through theme-based units.
In addition, a range of overlapping literacy and social practices took place in classroom routines. For example, similar social practices (e.g., interactional norms) and literacy practices were expected and promoted in reading group and shared reading events (e.g., wait quietly for the teacher's instruction and directions, be a good listener, respond to questions, ask questions, use only materials distributed by the teacher, attempt to read as a group or independently, use of a variety of cueing systems to develop word knowledge, etc.).

In general, planned literacy events, planned math events and planned social routines and practices were initiated and carried on by Mrs. Boyd. During the first weeks of school, Mrs. Boyd guided and orchestrated the process of establishing planned classroom routines. This process involved the introduction and reinforcement of rights and responsibilities, roles and relationships, and norms and expectations of participation in the classroom. It allowed the students' development of local or situated meanings in terms of their classroom daily or weekly schedule, and of when, where, and for what purpose classroom materials and spaces were available. As planned classroom routines were established, students were responsible for carrying on independently a number of them during morning and afternoon quiet work time (e.g., silent reading, independent writing, group project, math computer, math worksheets, identification cards for math computers, etc.). Students also initiated some of the planned routines (e.g., silent reading, independent writing and computer games) during their quiet work choice time. As the year progressed, the students took an active role in initiating or requesting shared reading
events with new materials brought from home or the school library, or created in the classroom.

Most classroom routines were established in the beginning of the year, although its organizational patterns evolved over time. For example, over the school year, the amount of student participation increased during shared reading events, and the students expanded their informal social routines with new literate practices (e.g., the use of maps, new games, etc.). During the school year, roles and relationships, and norms and expectations for classroom routines and social practices continued to be reinforced by the teacher, and they were also reinforced by the students. The classroom members' shared knowledge of culturally organized daily routines was essential in their process of becoming a classroom community and social group.

Mrs. Boyd’s implementation of planned classroom routines followed a guiding weekly schedule, which was organized around the school’s schedule (i.e., scheduled time of entrance, quiet time in the big area, lunch, dismissal, intervention services – Early Reading Intervention and Reading Recovery programs, and art, music and physical education activities). Figure 4.10 describes Mrs. Boyd’s guiding weekly schedule.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:15 – 9:00</td>
<td>Quiet work choice time (morning work choices, ERI, reading group, math computer)</td>
<td>Quiet work choice time (morning work choices, ERI, reading group, math computer)</td>
<td>Quiet work choice time (morning work choices, ERI, reading group, math computer)</td>
<td>Quiet work choice time (morning work choices, ERI, reading group, math computer)</td>
<td>Quiet work choice time (morning work choices, ERI, reading group, math computer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00 – 9:30</td>
<td>Silent reading (and/or ERI, math computer and reading group)</td>
<td>Silent reading (and/or ERI, math computer and reading group)</td>
<td>Silent reading (and/or ERI, math computer and reading group)</td>
<td>Silent reading (and/or ERI, math computer and reading group)</td>
<td>Silent reading (and/or ERI, math computer and reading group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30 – 9:55</td>
<td>Meeting (shared reading; interactive writing; calendar; and/or instructions)</td>
<td>Meeting (shared reading; interactive writing; calendar; and/or instructions)</td>
<td>Meeting (shared reading; interactive writing; calendar; and/or instructions)</td>
<td>Meeting (shared reading; interactive writing; calendar; and/or instructions)</td>
<td>Meeting (shared reading; interactive writing; calendar; and/or instructions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:55 – 10:45</td>
<td>Morning work time</td>
<td>Morning work time</td>
<td>Morning work time</td>
<td>Morning work time</td>
<td>Morning work time</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:55 – 10:05</td>
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<td>10:05 – 11:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:45 – 11:00</td>
<td>Clean up; Meeting (shared reading); and Getting ready for lunch</td>
<td>Clean up; Meeting (shared reading); and Getting ready for lunch</td>
<td>Clean up; Meeting (shared reading); and Getting ready for lunch</td>
<td>Clean up; Meeting (shared reading); and Getting ready for lunch</td>
<td>Clean up; Meeting (shared reading); and Getting ready for lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00 – 12:00</td>
<td>Lunch Recess</td>
<td>Lunch Recess</td>
<td>Lunch Recess</td>
<td>Lunch Recess</td>
<td>Lunch Recess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00 – 12:30</td>
<td>Silent reading (reading group, RR)</td>
<td>Silent reading (reading group, RR)</td>
<td>Silent reading (reading group, RR)</td>
<td>Silent reading (reading group, RR)</td>
<td>Gym/ Planning time</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:00 – 12:55</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Library</td>
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<td>12:20 – 12:30</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30 – 12:45</td>
<td>Meeting (shared reading and instructions)</td>
<td>Meeting (shared reading and instructions)</td>
<td>Meeting (shared reading and instructions)</td>
<td>Meeting (shared reading and instructions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:45 – 2:00</td>
<td>Journal writing</td>
<td>Afternoon work time</td>
<td>Afternoon work time</td>
<td>Afternoon work time</td>
<td>Meeting (instructions) and Afternoon work time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:45 – 1:20</td>
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<td>1:20 – 2:30</td>
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<td>2:00 – 2:30</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:30</td>
<td>Dismissal</td>
<td>Dismissal</td>
<td>Dismissal</td>
<td>Dismissal</td>
<td>Dismissal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4.10 Julie Boyd’s Guiding Weekly Schedule**

Note: Morning and afternoon work time included independent writing and math assignments, and quiet work choice time after finished.
Mrs. Boyd's weekly schedule varied depending on special events (e.g., classroom parties, fieldtrips, and guest speakers). The implementation of formal assessment activities at every progress report period also affected the organization of Mrs. Boyd's guiding weekly schedule. Time allocated for classroom routines such as independent writing, silent reading, interactive writing and particularly the reading group events was used to complete the formal assessment schedule. The classroom daily and weekly schedule was centered around the meeting times. Meetings occurred throughout the day, and they included shared reading and interactive writing events, calendar, and math problem solving activities. During meeting, Mrs. Boyd also introduced new information and gave directions for independent or group quiet work time. In the classroom, the students' informal social routines occurred primarily during quiet work choice time and quiet work time (morning or afternoon).

As earlier described in figure 4.9, classroom routines and social practices took place in particular classroom locations. The district's provisory split session allowed more classroom space in the big area, which almost doubled Mrs. Boyd's first grade classroom space. This year Mrs. Boyd used additional bookshelves in the meeting area, which were available from teachers who had moved to a different district.

Overall Mrs. Boyd's organization of classroom space was kept the same over the school year. In the middle of the year (in the winter), she changed the location of some of the tables and individual desks, and a few bookshelves. She assigned individual desks for a number of students during quiet work time in order to reinforce behavioral expectations and prevent distractions during quiet work time. Figure 4.11 is a map of the classroom in
the beginning of the school year until early winter, and figure 4.12 is a map of the classroom from winter until the end of the school year.

Next, I describe the opportunities for literacy teaching and learning embedded in planned literacy events, planned math events and planned and informal social routines.
Figure 4.11 Classroom Map: Fall and Early Winter
Figure 4.12 Classroom Map: Winter and Spring
Planned Literacy Events

Among the planned routines carried on in Mrs. Boyd’s classroom, planned literacy events took a central place. Planned literacy events comprised activities (or sequence of actions) that primarily focused on literacy learning and teaching. However, all planned literacy events (except for reading groups and formal assessment) also integrated arts and the other content areas of the district’s course of study (i.e., math, science, social studies and health). In addition, daily planned literacy events served as “an important temporal and sequential marker” (Cochran-Smith, 1984) for other classroom events that would follow during the day.

Included among planned literacy events were activities identified by Mrs. Boyd as “shared reading,” “interactive writing,” “reading group,” “silent reading,” “independent writing,” “group project” and “assessment” (which I define as “formal assessment”). Shared reading, interactive writing, silent reading and independent writing events were implemented daily in the classroom (see figure 4.10). At least twice every week, Mrs. Boyd worked with each reading group. Group projects were developed at least once in each thematic unit. Formal assessments were administered about every four weeks in order to meet the deadlines for the beginning and end of the year assessments, and the progress reports.

As I describe below, planned literacy events involved specific and overlapping literacy practices, which promoted opportunities for literacy learning and teaching across events and over time. In general, the nature of literacy practices promoted within planned
literacy events changed over time due to Mrs. Boyd's instructional and curriculum goals, and to changes in the students' learning and participation.

Shared Reading. Shared reading events were a central part of the classroom daily routine. As Mrs. Boyd described in her curriculum notes to the families:

Reading aloud is seen as the single most influential factor in a young child's success in learning to read. Each day I share three to four stories, songs or poems with your child. Big books with enlarged print allows children to see the conventions of print and are used as the basis for teaching the "mechanics" of reading. We may discuss, why certain words have capital letters, what punctuation marks are for, etc. Shared reading provides the framework for literature and language opportunities as well as offering a non-threatening approach to reading that strengthens skills and enjoyment. (Curriculum notes, August 1998)

Mrs. Boyd's weekly lesson plans included two to three shared reading events per day during whole group meeting time (see examples of lesson plans in Appendix K). Over the school year, she consistently shared two to four texts daily. These texts consisted of a variety of big books, fiction and non-fiction books, alphabet books, songs, poems and classroom writings.

Shared reading events involved two types of interactional patterns: (1) read aloud led by Mrs. Boyd, and (2) group or shared reading (and/or singing) in which all classroom members actively participated. During read aloud, Mrs. Boyd read the text primarily by herself and engaged the students in discussions about text structure and content. She engaged children in the process of reading to learn and for enjoyment. She also demonstrated a variety of reading strategies that support text reading; modeled fluent reading and expression; introduced new vocabulary and expanded students' linguistic
repertoire; examined the style and genre of various texts; developed a sense of story; promoted discussion of the setting, characters and main idea of a story; promoted space for students to share thoughts and feelings about a story or text; and linked new content and language structures to the students’ prior knowledge and experiences in shared reading as well as across events. Mrs. Boyd’s selection of books was guided by her curriculum goals, the topic of thematic units, the concepts and content areas expected to be covered by the district’s course of study, children’s interests and recent experiences, and special events.

Mrs. Boyd engaged her students in the reading process by supporting intertextual ties and drawing from their prior and shared background (e.g., knowledge of words, content of the story, and oral language background). Thus, the reading of new books was situated within the children’s prior and shared experiences (e.g., the content of thematic units), as well as their future classroom activities. Consistently throughout the year, texts were used as basis for other literacy events such as independent writing, group projects, formal assessment (writing rubric assessment), and silent reading. That is, read aloud was used as prompts for brainstorming ideas for independent writing and drawing (including the writing rubric assessment), group projects. It also provided a first and guided reading of books that were then available for silent reading.

Mrs. Boyd’s use of this range of instructional strategies evolved throughout the year based on the students’ literacy learning and her perception of what they needed to learn next in the context of whole group instruction. The nature of students’ participation during read aloud also changed over the year. For example, in the beginning of the school
year, Mrs. Boyd’s introduction of new texts involved the reinforcement of basic knowledge about text format (e.g., identifying the title page), ways of using the cover page (title words and picture) to brainstorm the content of the story. Early in the school year, some book introductions also involved more time spent on exploring ways of using the cover page (title words and picture) to brainstorm and make guesses about the content of the story, and to model independent writing based on picture cues. Mrs. Boyd also spent more time reinforcing behavioral expectations and norms for meeting time.

Shared reading and/or singing events were also led by Mrs. Boyd; however, the students were expected to take an active role by reading and/or singing along the whole text. Similar to read aloud, shared reading and/or singing also involved a range of reading strategies. In these events, Mrs. Boyd engaged the students in successful and enjoyable reading (and/or singing) experiences; included all students and supported the development of a classroom community; demonstrated early strategies (e.g., word-by-word matching, located known vocabulary, etc.) \(^{16}\); introduced new vocabulary; pointed out rhyming words and examined work chunks and word families; demonstrated phrased reading; created a body of available known texts that the students could use for independent reading and as point of reference for independent writing. The students engaged in the reading aloud of familiar books by reading with Mrs. Boyd parts (i.e., repetitive language patterns) or the whole book. Shared reading also took place after whole group activities such as interactive writing events and writing personal cards, when Mrs. Boyd and the students read and re-read their writings.

\(^{16}\) Early reading strategies used on text involve directional movement, one-to-one matching, locating one or two known words and locating an unknown word (Clay, 1993a).
Interactive Writing. Interactive writing events occurred daily. They were initiated and led by Mrs. Boyd, and occurred during meeting time. In these events, Mrs. Boyd and the students wrote a daily sentence based on their experiences in the classroom, at school or at home, or on their list of weekly words. As she explained to the families early in the school year,

In the classroom, writing is modeled daily. As we discuss things, I will often write what they are saying. Each day, we write a daily message on the board. Children participate by telling me what to write, what letters make the sounds they hear, and by helping to write the letter or the word on the board. Through this daily message, we will also discuss words and talk about words which rhyme, the different ways a sound may be spelled, and other conventions of print.

(Curriculum notes, August 1998)

Mrs. Boyd and students took turns writing the words on the board. She asked individual students to either write, help another child remember to put space, or point to the words. All students were involved in the reading of the sentences written. Students volunteered to participate and/or were invited by Mrs. Boyd. During interactive writing events, Mrs. Boyd also examined word chunks (or word families) in order to provide students' with strategies to problem-solve new words in their writing and reading.

Mrs. Boyd and the students also took turns writing their questions or knowledge about the topic of thematic units, and writing about books read in the classroom. For example, in the beginning of the school year, they wrote about Dogs in Space (Coffelt, 1993). This activity aimed at demonstrating and developing organizational strategies for writing a story.
We were talking about Dogs in Space. We wrote words to make a story. We sound out letters to spell the words. (Classroom book project October 1998)

Interactive writing events also involved a second type of interactional pattern; that is, when Mrs. Boyd served as the scriber for the group’s ideas. For example, when brainstorming questions about the content of new units or ideas of things to write about a particular topic (or book); writing thank you note cards; as well as writing the students’ suggestions of rhyming words when working on word families or word chunks. In these events, Mrs. Boyd demonstrated organizational strategies for writing, extended the students’ vocabulary, demonstrated ways to communicate ideas and feelings through writing, and promoted knowledge of audience and writing styles. She also talked about words that rhyme, the different ways a sound may be spelled, and other language conventions.

The nature of the literacy practices used in interactive writing was extended over time. For example, in the beginning of the school year, taking into account some of the students’ limited word vocabulary, Mrs. Boyd connected their prior knowledge of the letters of their names with the words being written on the board. For example, asking a student to write the word do because she knew it from her name which started with the same letters.

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17 The classroom book project was organized by Mrs. Boyd and I. The purpose was to write with the students a book about their classroom routines. Mrs. Boyd selected photographs from a number of classroom activities, which she shared with small groups of 2 to 3 students. With each group, Mrs. Boyd talked about 3 to 4 pictures, and they wrote about them on a large chart. Mrs. Boyd did most of the writing. The book became part of their classroom library, and was available in book size copies for students to take home.
Reading Groups.

We read in small groups. We use the writing boards to write a sentence. We write because we have to — it helps us learn to read and write. (Classroom book project, October 1998)

Mrs. Boyd worked with reading groups on a weekly basis generally in the morning period. Reading groups were initiated and led by Mrs. Boyd, and they were organized as small groups or one-to-one interactions. Groups ranged from two to five students. Reading group events occurred at the reading table (see classroom map in figures 4.10 or 4.11). When working with small groups, Mrs. Boyd had materials ready at the reading table and distributed them as needed during the activity. These materials involved two to three leveled books selected by Mrs. Boyd (a copy for each student), small white boards and markers for individual writing (and socks for erasing their writing), and/or writing papers and pencils. When working with one student, the book was selected either by Mrs. Boyd or by the student. Reading comprehension was a special focus of these interactions.

Mrs. Boyd considered reading group events as critical to support individual students’ reading progress.

The children will be involved in small reading groups which will focus on their particular needs in reading. These reading groups will provide the opportunity to problem-solve while reading for meaning, give the opportunity to use reading strategies, and will challenge the children to develop as readers. (Curriculum notes, August 1998)

Her instructional strategies were adapted to the students’ individual needs. For example, during the school year, when working with Laurie or Kiera (who were reading above
grade level), Mrs. Boyd focused on reading comprehension skills, their response to the readings, their construction of meaning. With other students (e.g., Derek, Bobby and Luana), she worked on building reading strategies to problem solve new words (e.g., using a variety of cueing systems), building word knowledge and developing fluency, as well as reading for meaning. Reading group activities involved reading leveled books, and writing isolated words or simple sentences.

Although Mrs. Boyd met with all her students individually or in small groups, she focused particular attention on the students who were not being served by the school’s intervention services (ERI or RR programs). Mrs. Boyd tried to schedule meetings on a regular basis. Formal assessment requirements and special events affected her reading group schedule. Finding a consistent block of time and being able to meet with all her students were concerns throughout the year, particularly taking into account the district’s new reading proficiency standard for first grade.

Silent reading. Silent reading events occurred in general twice a day. They occurred during quiet work time in the meeting area or in other classroom locations.

We read every day a couple of times a day. We learn to read by reading. …
(Classroom book project, October 1998)

Mrs. Boyd distributed book tubs around different tables in the classroom, and assigned groups of students to each table. Each book tub had a selection of thirty books approximately for one or more book levels. Mrs. Boyd had one tub for each of the following book levels: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 18, and 20. She also had more than one book
level put together in one tub: 9 and 10; 11, 12 and 13; 14, 15 and 16; and a selection of chapter books.

During silent reading, students were assigned to a table where they would find books to read at their level. Students also initiated silent reading during their quiet work choice time. The listening center and a computer reading program were other options for silent reading time available during quiet work choice time.

**Independent writing.** The students were exposed to a variety of opportunities to write for different and authentic purposes (e.g., journal writing, science reports, letters, how to do letters, sentence of the day, handwriting handouts, etc.). As Mrs. Boyd explained to families,

Children write because they have something to say or because they are exploring with a pencil or crayon. Children are naturally trying to figure out the conventions of print such as where to put spaces, use punctuation and capital letters. They learn to write by writing and are given many opportunities to write in the classroom. Children are encouraged to write in their own way and write for ownership. They write in play and in response to literature and are encouraged to share their work with others. (Curriculum notes, August 1998)

Mrs. Boyd’s selection of independent writing activities varied over time. It took into account the students’ interests, writing abilities, her literacy curriculum goals, and the district’s course of study and writing proficiency standard. For example, in the beginning of the school year, she provided activities that aimed at building word and letter knowledge, understanding the concept of words, letters and space between words, etc.
Mrs. Boyd displayed many of the students' writings and drawings on the walls either in the classroom or the school hallways.

Independent writing occurred throughout the day: as part of morning work choice activities, during quiet work time, and/or quiet free choice time. Interaction among students was an important part of independent writing activities except when silence was expected for testing purposes or students (who were having trouble completing the activity) were assigned to a separate location.

**Group projects.** In each theme-based unit, Mrs. Boyd implemented group projects in order to promote group problem-solving skills, expand the content learned, promote art activities which supported the students' expression of their ideas and understanding, support literacy practices (e.g., quiet reading and writing), etc. The development of group projects was supported by Mrs. Boyd's rich selection of children's literature. Some of the projects were extensions of books read during read aloud, and involved independent work. Students worked independently or with classmates, and in many cases, they shared their projects with each other during free choice time. For example, the pumpkin and hungry caterpillar projects, the collage picture based on *The Snowy Day* (Keats, 1962), and the class mural for the Dinosaur unit:

> We read some books and made projects from them. We made pumpkin books and did a hungry caterpillar work. (Classroom book project, October 1998)

> [Ask Me About] ...making a collage picture after sharing the book, *The Snowy Day*. We used different paper including different colored construction paper and wallpaper. The pictures are fabulous! Then we wrote about the story. These are on display in our room. (Ask Me About, January 1999)
[Ask Me About] ... making a class mural. Each of us (or in small groups) made a dinosaur. We also cut leaves, etc. to make it look more like a jungle. We really enjoyed doing this. (Ask Me About, March 1999)

Group projects were displayed on the classroom’s mural, wall or boards. The students had opportunities to show and talk about their learning experiences with each other and their family members (e.g., during dismissal, special school activities, the student-led conferences, etc.).

**Formal Assessment.** Mrs. Boyd used formal and informal assessment practices to inform her literacy teaching and assess students’ progress and growth, and as criteria to evaluate the students’ progress in meeting the district’s reading and writing proficiency standards. While informal assessment took place throughout the day during classroom interactions, formal assessment involved particular patterns of interaction and sequence of actions.

Formal assessment practices occurred in a cyclical routine. They included the implementation of standardized district-wide, grade-level assessments; the district’s benchmarks in reading, writing and math; and the school’s student progress report. This implementation process involved (1) testing students, and completing their progress report every grade card period (every nine weeks); (2) meeting district-wide, beginning and end of the year, assessment requirements for literacy (i.e., assessing text reading level, letter identification, writing vocabulary, sentence dictation, and writing sample) and math; and (3) completing the district’s benchmarks on reading, writing and math for each
student at the end of the school year. Mrs. Boyd’s process of preparing the progress report cards involved assessing students through ongoing observations, analysis of students’ daily work, and standardized tests (i.e., components of The Observation Survey; the Dolch Sight Words, the district’s writing rubric; and spelling test). In order to meet the progress report deadline, Mrs. Body started the process of assessing students with standardized tests about every four weeks.

Planned Math Events, and Planned and Informal Social Routines

Planned math events and planned and informal social routines (i.e., students’ peer culture life) also constituted opportunities for literacy learning and teaching. A range of literate practices was used within the structure of planned math events, and planned and informal social routines. For example, early reading strategies such as word-by-word matching and locating known words constituted a literacy practice necessary for successful participation in a variety of literacy (e.g., silent reading) and math events (e.g., math worksheets), and social routines (e.g. identification cards for math computers, checking responsibility chart, games). As a group of students explained, the responsibility chart also helped them learn names:

This is our job chart. We use it to see if we carry the lunch tub, clean math shelves or are in charge of books. It helps us learn names. (Classroom book project, October 1998)

Although literacy learning and teaching was not the focus of the interactions in math events and social routines, literacy was used as a mediator and artifact to
communicate new content, to complete assignments, to reinforce responsibilities and expectations (e.g., responsibility chart; morning work choice chart, and classroom rules), and to develop and maintain friendships. In addition, opportunities for literacy learning and teaching were embedded in the use of written materials representing the “material culture” (Cochran-Smith, 1984) of the classroom (e.g., label of materials available for quiet work choice time, directions for computer games, observation of the teacher or other adults’ use of written materials) and school (e.g., school murals, displays and signs).

Math events, planned and informal social routines occurred with the same regularity as planned literacy events. Math computer and computer games activities occurred daily, and group problem solving, calendar and math worksheets occurred daily or on a weekly basis. Informal social routines were initiated and developed by students and constituted the students’ peer culture life. As described earlier, in the students’ section, literate practices were regularly present in the students’ social activities.

Literacy practices were also used as a mediator in classroom social practices (e.g., lunch count, clean up), and math activities developed outside the content of theme-based units. These math activities developed at the collective and individual level required the use of literacy practices for their successful completion. Literacy events and practices were an essential mediator for meaning making.

In short, literacy was embedded throughout daily routines and activities. The students were exposed to a range of classroom routines, which involved opportunities for literacy learning and teaching. Literacy practices were also used as a medium by which
learning and teaching in other content areas (i.e., math, science, social studies and health) occurred.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described and displayed separately four layers of context: the district (and state standards), the school, the community and family, and the classroom. My purpose was to pull them apart in order to describe literacy as framed within each of these contexts. It was impossible not to address their interdependence since opportunities for literacy learning and teaching were shaped and/or constrained the interdependence among these contexts. In other words, as shown in figure 4.13, opportunities for literacy learning and teaching were situated and constituted in interactional spaces constructed at the classroom level, which were embedded and interdependent with the district (and state standards), school, and community and family contexts.

Figure 4.13 brings together all four layers of context previously described: the district (and state standards), the community and family, the school, and the classroom. The district placed expectations on the content to be taught at the classroom level, guidelines on formal ways of literacy assessment (including its schedule), and reading and writing proficiency standards. It was interdependent with another layer of context, the state’s push for competency-based education programs (e.g., the state’s Model Competency-Based Language Arts Program) and legislature on proficiency testing and a fourth grade reading guarantee. As explained by Mrs. Boyd,
History of Public Education in the United States

The National Standards-Based Reform Movement

Classroom context adapted from Weade (1992)

Figure 4.13 Literacy Learning and Teaching as Situated within Multiple Layers of Context

1Classroom context adapted from Weade (1992)
[The decision to increase proficiency standards] came from central office, it didn’t come like from what teachers were thinking but I think it’s also that they’re finding that, you know, at level 12 – if the kids are reading at a level 12 [at the end of first grade] that they won’t necessarily pass the fourth grade proficiency test. (AT, August 1998)

Passing the fourth grade proficiency test is currently a state-level concern as teachers, schools, and districts’ programs are being compared and evaluated based on proficiency scores.

The school’s history and educational philosophy also constituted sources of support and/or constrains on the nature of the literacy curriculum co-constructed at the classroom level. Highwood’s history as a child-centered, literature-based and thematic program was a schoolwide effort, which supported and promoted collaboration among individual teachers’ curriculum implementation. On the other hand, meeting fourth grade proficiency standards promoted tension among primary and higher grades teachers. In past years, higher grade teachers had felt students were not coming to them with enough background. This tension and the district’s new proficiency standards for first and second grade level have distributed the pressure of meeting state proficiency standards among all teachers. In this way, meeting proficiency standards and progressively covering the content assessed in the fourth grade proficiency test are concerns shared by all the teachers. Highwood’s new attendance area and lack of parent involvement were also sources of concern, which increased teachers’ worries of meeting proficiency standards.

I think, yeah, the pressure [on fourth grade proficiency scores] is coming in [to the primary grades] (^^^). You hear even, you know, within the teachers that have only taught the upper grades … some people [have said]… “They’ve [the students] come to us that way, I don’t know what they’re [primary teachers] doing.” I mean, wait a minute, they don’t come to us – you know … in
kindergarten they don’t know what a number is, you know, they can’t count, they
don’t know the letters in their name, can’t write their name yet. Well, there is a
limit. I said – I think, I really believe that everybody should teach kindergarten for
a year so that you know what’s like when they come. And that’s changed a lot too
from the years passed. Like 10 years ago, the kids came with a lot more
knowledge, you know, school knowledge … [and] wise and ready for school than
what they’re now. (^^^) Part of it is that [the new attendance area]. I think, part of
it is because both parents are working maybe more… (^^^) (Julie Boyd, AT,
August 1998)

At the classroom level, Julie Boyd’s literacy curriculum goals and ongoing
decision-making had to take into account the district (and state standards), the school, and
family and community contexts. When Mrs. Boyd started the school year, she had
concerns and worried about meeting the district’s push for higher proficiency standards
for first and second grade level.

My long-term goal with the kids … Obviously you know that our district is raising
the levels, increasing each – throw the two next years (^^^) … Now they should
be at level 14 at the end of this year, and level 16 (^^^) next year. (^^^) … It’s – It
just doesn’t make a lot of sense especially when the jump is like “Well, they
should be at level 20 at the end of second grade.” If they got that good basic
knowledge, then they’ll keep going … and they’ll take off and they’re gonna
read. And why are we saying that they need to jump? Ideally, which they say, they
should come to you reading a level 4 … and how many out of 26 … are at a level
4 or above? Not – I don’t think there’s many … (^^^). That’s 10 up, it’s 10
difficult levels, I mean it really is… (^^^). Now some kids – you know, a lot of
that, I still believe it’s truly developmental. You know, some kids who might still
be struggling at the end of second, or first grade who aren’t reading at level 12
will take off … in second grade and do fine. See I don’t … think … you can – you
can’t say across the board if you are not reading at level 12 or 14 they are gonna
fail because children develop in different stages. But I think they’re trying to give
us – that guideline of saying “oh, this is really helping me to shoot for ” (^^^)
What do they think you can do? You know, I mean it’s – you know, you’re
limited too on what you can do. (^^^) (AT, August 1998)
Proficiency standards, assessment requirements and the content of the district’s course of study shaped and constrained the way Mrs. Boyd taught.

I think — we found it has affected [the way we teach]. We’re [Highwood teachers] ... probably ... I don’t want to say looser but ..., you know, you did more theme work. I think we still do theme work but you find yourself, like, really concentrating, you know, on the math, (***) on the reading and writing (^^^). It’s not — it’s not that we didn’t in the past but we’re just ... more focused, I guess, on it. And, you know, there’s times instead of ... maybe having the kids do some wonderful art work that, you know, that extends the book, but you do more paper and pencil type things because ... you know, they need that practice for the test. (^^^) You don’t feel that you can ... maybe go in-depth with somethings as you would like to because you gotta move on, because you got — you know, there is so much curriculum that they give you by content areas. (^^^) (AT, August 1998)

Related to these concerns were parent involvement and a large classroom size. Mrs. Boyd saw parent involvement as an indicator of students’ success. Early in the school year, she worried about meeting individual needs of a group of 26 students.

It just seems like so crowded ... and I had 21 at the end of the [last] year but it just seems, I mean ... (^^^). It just seems massive, you know. (^^^) Yeah, it’s a lot of kids. (Julie Boyd, AT, August 1998)

In addition, Mrs. Boyd’s ongoing decision-making and literacy curriculum were shaped by her frames of reference and theoretical and experiential knowledge on literacy learning and teaching; the students’ frames of reference (e.g., personal history, abilities, and interests); the history of their classroom community or social group; and the available classroom space, materials and time. For example, as figure 4.14 illustrates, Mrs. Boyd’s process of getting ready for the beginning of the school year was shaped by negotiation of multiple layers of context. In other words, she had to negotiate her frames of reference, theoretical and experiential knowledge, and curriculum goals; the district’s course of
study and assessment requirements; the district's proficiency standards; the state legislation on proficiency standards and a fourth grade reading guarantee; the school's history and philosophy; the school's physical and human resources, and schedule; a large class size; the school's new attendance area; a new group of students (she had kept the same group for the prior 2 years); and the school's history of family involvement.

All these factors continued to play an important role on Mrs. Boyd's decision-making and process of curriculum enactment throughout the year, and how literacy practices were defined, as well as the possibility of promoting her educational philosophy. As the school year started, Mrs. Boyd's planning and development of a literacy curriculum also negotiated the students' response, interests, and classroom participation. In other words, classroom opportunities for literacy learning and teaching were created within interactional spaces built by classroom members, and situated and constituted by contexts outside the classroom. In the next chapter (chapter 5), I show how the dynamic, interdependent, and co-constructed nature of literacy learning and teaching in Julie Boyd's classroom. Opportunities for literacy teaching and learning were situated, constituted and shaped by the interplay of multiple layers of context.
Frames of Reference (e.g., insider knowledge of the community), Theoretical and Experiential Knowledge (e.g., educational philosophy), and Curriculum Goals

The District's Course of Study and Assessment Requirements

The District's Proficiency Standards

State Legislation on Proficiency Standards and a Fourth Grade Guarantee

History of Family Involvement

New Students

The School's History and Philosophy

The School's Physical and Human Resources, and Schedule

Large Class Size

The School's New Attendance Area

Figure 4.14 Getting Ready for the School Year: Mrs. Boyd's Negotiation of Multiple and Interdependent contexts
CHAPTER 5

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE NATURE OF CURRICULUM CO-CONSTRUCTION

So far, I have described the many multi-layered contexts in which classroom opportunities for literacy learning and teaching were embedded and constituted. I have described how literacy was framed in the classroom context and by three layers of context outside the classroom (i.e., the district and state standards, the school, and the community and family). My initial description of these layers of context focused on building a broad picture of the multi-layered context in which classroom literacy teaching and learning was embedded and situated, and the range of literacy opportunities interwoven in daily classroom routines and practices. However, the nature of literacy learning and teaching in Julie Boyd’s classroom involved a dynamic, co-constructed and interdependent relationship of the contexts. In this chapter, I examine how the nature of literacy learning and teaching in Julie Boyd’s classroom can be understood as a co-constructed process, shaped by the interplay of these multiple layers of context and the participants involved in them.

In this chapter, I investigate the nature of curriculum co-construction by revealing the connections between, and the interdependence of layers of context. I use the concept of “tracer units” (Green, Kantor & Fernie, 1992) as a unit of analysis. As described in
chapter 3, a tracer unit is a focus, for example on an individual child’s experiences (Kantor, Elgas & Fernie, 1993) or on the co-construction of a piece of the curriculum, that allows to both examine questions about the tracer unit itself, and to illuminate the local and the larger contexts that situate and constitute the tracer unit. In other words, with tracer units, I “cut” across layers of context in order to illuminate and examine the influence of these contexts on the nature of literacy learning and teaching as it is co-constructed over time. As explained in chapter 3, I selected four tracer units to illuminate and examine the influence of multiple layers of contexts on the nature of literacy learning and teaching as it is co-constructed across events and over time. The process of selecting and defining the tracer units involved a principled decision, which took into account major aspects of classroom literacy practices: a group event, an individual story, a curriculum piece, and assessment. Four tracer units are utilized: (1) assessment practices; (2) a piece of the classroom’s literacy curriculum called “songs and poems;” (3) a planned literacy event over time called “shared reading;” and (4) the story of the literacy learning of one student named Derek. It is relevant to note that the stories of each of the seven focal students were unique, complex and revealing; however, limitations on the scope and size of this dissertation led me to focus on the story of one student.
Meeting Assessment Requirements

To examine the co-constructed and interdependent nature of literacy learning and teaching in Julie Boyd's classroom, I start by tracing the assessment practices implemented over the school year. Assessment practices were a critical part of Julie Boyd's literacy curriculum, particularly the ongoing assessment of students' progress and use of authentic forms of assessment such as portfolios and student progress reports. Assessment practices informed and shaped her teaching, process of curriculum implementation, organization of daily schedule, and communication with families. Although Mrs. Boyd used assessment as an important tool to gather information about the students' progress and guide teaching decisions, meeting assessment requirements and proficiency standards set by the district's competency-based program created dilemmas and additional pressures. Classroom opportunities for literacy learning and teaching had to be adapted to the district's assessment schedule and its proficiency standards; as a result, these requirements and standards shaped the nature of classroom literacy learning and teaching. In other words, assessment practices were a major force in what constituted literacy in the classroom and how it became defined over the school year.

One way to see the impact of assessment practices in the nature of literacy learning and teaching in Julie Boyd's classroom is to trace them over time. The nature of classroom literacy and its assessment practices was constituted and defined by contexts outside the classroom (i.e., district, school, family and community) and interactional spaces built in the classroom. By tracing the life of assessment practices, I can see that the district's assessment requirements and new standards, and the school's history of
implementing authentic forms of assessment, influenced and shaped the nature of classroom opportunities for literacy learning and teaching as well as Mrs. Boyd's contact with families and overall school climate. In this section, the tracer goes from outside the classroom (i.e., the district’s competency-based program and new proficiency standards as a response to the state’s legislation and guidelines, and the school’s history of implementing authentic forms of assessment) to inside the classroom (i.e., what became constituted as literacy learning and teaching at the classroom level). I look at the co-constructed nature of assessment practices within multiple layers of interdependent contexts showing: (1) assessment as constituted in each of these contexts, and (2) assessment as a major force in what constituted literacy in the classroom for all of its participants including families.

Assessment as Constituted by Multiple Layers of Context

The assessment practices implemented at the classroom level followed district guidelines, the school’s philosophy, and Julie Boyd’s philosophy and curriculum goals. Maple Grove School District’s competency-based program determined a series of assessment practices in order to meet state guidelines and legislation. At the same time, Highwood’s philosophy and history also placed expectations on Mrs. Boyd’s use of authentic forms of assessment. In the classroom, Mrs. Boyd implemented additional ways of assessing students in order to inform her teaching, research and gather reliable information on students’ reading and writing abilities, and to involve families and students in the learning process.
In chapter 4, as I described literacy as framed within the classroom context and contexts outside the classroom (i.e., the district, school, and family and community), I addressed how assessment practices are defined by each of these contexts. Below I briefly review these definitions in order to reintegrate these multiple frames. I focus on the district and state’s, school’s, and teacher’s perspectives on assessment, which shaped what became defined as assessment practices and what constituted literacy in the classroom.

District and State Assessment Guidelines and Standards

Following state guidelines and legislation, Maple Grove School District is required to implement classroom level assessment strategies and standardized district-wide, grade-level assessments. As described in chapter 4, the district’s implementation of the state’s competency-based education (CBE) program has involved the standardized administration of annual district-wide, grade-level assessments at the beginning and end of the school year. At first grade level, teachers are required to assess their students in reading, writing and math. Students are assessed in reading and writing through standardized testing instruments, which include four components of the Observation Survey (Clay, 1993) and the district’s writing rubric method. The students’ scores in the district-wide assessments are sent to the district’s central office.

Maple Grove School District also implements school-wide (i.e., student progress report) and district-wide (i.e., benchmarks in reading, writing and math for k-8) authentic forms of assessment. Teachers are required to complete student progress reports and send
them to students’ home every nine weeks. They are also required to complete benchmarks in reading, writing and math at the end of the school year, which are kept in the students’ cumulative folders. Copies of the students’ progress report and benchmarks are kept in their school’s cumulative folders.

As a response to the state’s legislation on a “Fourth Grade Guarantee” (Ohio Department of Education, 1999), Maple Grove School District raised the proficiency standards for reading level at the end of first and second grades. The district’s goal of raising the reading level at the end of first grade (from level 12 to level 14) was to prevent students from reaching fourth grade unprepared and at risk of not passing the state’s reading proficiency test. At the time Mrs. Boyd’s students reach fourth grade, they will be part of the first group of students, who will be affected by the state’s fourth grade guarantee. That is, students who do not pass the reading portion of the state’s fourth-grade proficiency test will be retained in fourth grade.

Thus, district-wide assessments and proficiency standards were requirements (themselves shaped by the state’s legislation and competency-based program) that influenced Mrs. Boyd’s literacy curriculum, selection of assessment practices, and weekly schedule. On one hand, they provided assessment tools and a common language that helped teachers, within the district, describe and identify to each other their students’ abilities and progress. On the other hand, they placed restrictions on the selection of assessment practices; the classroom time available to meet overall curriculum goals during testing periods; and how Mrs. Boyd’s literacy curriculum was implemented (e.g., the focus of specific literacy activities). Further, the district’s reading and writing
proficiency standards placed restrictions and expectations on what was measured as students’ literacy learning at the end of the school year. For example, the district’s writing rubric method represents their expectations for students at first grade. It identifies if a student is advanced, proficient and non-proficient first grade writers by relying on two writing samples for each student (i.e., one in the beginning of the school year, and another at the end of the year).

The School’s Assessment Practices

The use of portfolio and authentic assessment are part of Highwood elementary’s distinguishing features. These assessment practices support the school’s developmental and child-centered approach to learning, and focus on a balanced, process and product-oriented approach. For example, the use of portfolio supports the teachers’ ongoing assessment of students’ progress.

Highwood teachers have been actively involved in Maple Grove School District’s process of development of school-wide and district-wide authentic forms of assessment. For the past six years, they have implemented an alternative method of reporting student progress (i.e., their student progress report) that was developed by the school’s staff in conjunction with university faculty as part of a professional development program. Their aim is to provide families with more information about their children’s individual growth and development. Additionally, Highwood was a site for the district’s first year implementation of the district-wide benchmarks in reading, writing and math. These
benchmarks in reading and writing follow a developmental continuum, which was adapted from Highwood’s student progress report.

As mentioned in chapter 4, Highwood teachers showed concern about meeting the district’s CBE assessment expectations, especially meeting new proficiency standards for first and second grade, and making connections within the content taught all along the primary grades with the content assessed in the fourth-grade proficiency test. The pressure of meeting proficiency standards, which was originally placed on fourth grade teacher, has been distributed among all the primary grade teachers. At the same time, the district’s proficiency standards and assessment deadline raise conflict in relation to the school’s developmental philosophy, which recognizes that “children learn at different rates and in different ways” (Student Progress Report, 1994).

The Teacher’s Assessment Practices

Assessment was a critical part of Julie Boyd’s literacy curriculum. She used formal and informal ways to assess her students’ growth and progress, and to inform her ongoing decision-making at the group and individual level. Formal assessment practices involved policy-driven, and district-wide and schoolwide required assessments such as the standardized district-wide, grade-level assessments; the district’s benchmarks in reading, writing and math; and the school’s student progress report. Informal ways of assessment involved teacher-initiated classroom observations of students’ participation in meetings, their involvement and completion of classroom assignments (e.g., science report, math problems, journal writing, etc.), their participation in reading group events,
their independent reading, and one-on-one interactions (e.g., having students read their
writing assignments, asking questions individually, etc.).

Mrs. Boyd used classroom level or informal assessment strategies as ways of
gathering information on students’ progress in reading and writing, and to decide what
instructional strategies to take next at the individual and group level. Informal ways of
assessing the students’ progress were an important part of Mrs. Boyd’s decision-making
process. For example, she made decisions on which book to use next (and in many cases
to send home), as well as reading group arrangements and focus, based on running
records taken on a regular basis of students’ reading. She observed and learned about the
students’ writing process by having them read to her quickly what they wrote before
taking their work to the finished tub. In these interactions, she also made important
teaching points.

Mrs. Boyd’s ongoing assessment of her students’ literacy learning covered all the
classroom level strategies suggested in the state’s Model Competency-Based Language
Arts Program (i.e., observation of children as they work and interact with others;
assessment of children’s works; assessment through oral and written means; and
collection of evidences of children’s literacy growth over time in portfolios). At the
classroom level, she valued the ongoing assessment of her students’ growth through the
use of portfolios, classroom observations, and one-on-one interactions. She also
organized student-led conferences, which provided information not only to families but
also to the students about their growth and progress in reading and writing.
Informal and formal ways of assessing the students’ progress were interdependent in that one informed and complemented the other. For example, Mrs. Boyd gathered information to complete each student progress report through classroom level observations (in some cases, through conversations with the reading teachers) and by individually assessing students’ text reading level, word knowledge, and their writing (e.g., ability to hear and record sounds in words, awareness of space between words, appropriate use of capital and lower case letters, development and organization of ideas, sense of story, etc.). This process also included assessment of students’ progress in math, and their participation and involvement in thematic units implemented over the school year.

Mrs. Boyd had concerns about the district’s new reading proficiency standard, and its criteria for determining writing proficiency. Guided by her theoretical and experiential knowledge, Mrs. Boyd saw learning to read and write as developmental, and believed on the importance of students writing more elaborated stories rather than a primary focus on spelling, and correct punctuation and use of capital and lower case letters. In other words, she expected children to be at different places and to progress at different rates. She also expected to interact with them differently, and make teaching decisions that build upon their prior knowledge. In the beginning of the school year, she was careful about pushing too hard students who did not see themselves as readers or writers. Despite the pressure of meeting the district’s proficiency standards, she saw as her basic goal to get a good sense of where these students were, and to move them along by building their confidence as readers and writers.
Assessment as a Major Force in What Constituted Classroom Literacy

In the above section, I reviewed assessment practices as framed by the district (and state), school and teacher. Their perspectives and expectations shaped what constituted assessment practices, and consequently, opportunities for literacy learning and teaching over the school year. In fact, formal assessment practices (in particular the intensive district-wide assessment schedule) combined with the district’s reading and writing proficiency standards influenced: (1) the organization and focus of classroom time, (2) the regularity and type of planned literacy events promoted in the classroom, (3) the length of thematic units, and (4) the type of school-home interactions. Thus, Julie Boyd’s decision-making and process of curriculum enactment was situated and co-constructed by the interplay of multiple layers of context. The requirements and expectations set by the district and state; the school’s philosophy and history; and her frames of reference, theoretical and experiential knowledge and curriculum goals, all shaped what became constituted as assessment practices in the classroom context.

In the process of curriculum development, Mrs. Boyd was required to meet deadlines for district-wide, standardized (beginning and end of the year testing) and authentic (student progress report and benchmarks) forms of assessment. As a result, the nature of this process of curriculum implementation was not equally co-constructed but instead followed a continuum in which, at times, the district, school or Mrs. Boyd had more power and control over decisions being made and the actions taken at the classroom level. Nevertheless, Mrs. Boyd had to constantly negotiate and attend to the district’s expectations in order to ensure that her students were meeting proficiency standards. At
the same time, she implemented additional formal and informal assessment practices in order to meet her curriculum goals and theoretical and experiential knowledge, the school’s philosophy, the students’ literacy background, and family expectations.

In essence, what became constituted as assessment practices involved negotiation of multiple layers of context. To illustrate how the assessment expectations and requirements set by these multiple layers of context influenced the nature of classroom life, below I show their influence on classroom time and curriculum, and on what constituted literacy for classroom members including families.

Assessment Shaping Classroom Time and Curriculum

Meeting a demanding assessment schedule set by the district’s competency-based program required changes in the classroom routines and the extent to which there was time left for implementing planned literacy events, particularly reading groups. For example, in the beginning of the school year, the primary teachers at Highwood had favored a staggered schedule \(^1\) in the first three days in order to meet assessment requirements. The staggered schedule was positive in that it allowed teachers to quickly gather information about students. On the other hand, it also intimidated students (Derek, for example) who might have succeeded better in the early assessments after getting to know more about their new teacher and classroom environment. In fact, the staggered schedule and intensive testing schedule responded well to the demands of district-wide

\(^1\) As previously explained, the students started school in a staggered scheduled; that is, the school divided each classroom in three groups for each of the first three days of school (August 26, 27 and 28) in order to speed the completion of early assessment requirements. The students only met as a whole group in the first day of their second week in school (August 31).
assessments but it contradicted the school’s philosophy and mission. In other words, it reinforced a sense of students’ having to possess particular knowledge and be at particular places (as assessed by the structure and content of the assessments used) instead of a child-centered environment in which each accomplishment is valued and children’s varied experiences are built upon. Although Mrs. Boyd reinforced many times during the students’ first day of school that they were in school to learn how to read and write, the time spent on testing provided a different message.

As shown in figure 5.1, meeting formal assessment requirements and proficiency standards affected the organization and focus of classroom time. In order to meet assessment requirements for the beginning of the school year, students were assessed not only in their first day in school but also at different times in the next three weeks. Students also wrote a writing sample (or writing rubric) based on a prompt on animals twice, first as a practice and their second sample was considered as final (that is, it was sent to the district’s central office for final scoring). This activity took two half days out of two weeks (i.e., September 10, 11, 15 and 16). Additionally, throughout the school year, Mrs. Boyd gave the students a prompt on animals, to draw and write about, once every month as writing rubric practice. In April, they had three writing rubric practices, and one of them was considered final. These writing practice activities focused on preparing students for their final writing sample. Although Mrs. Boyd also reinforced the district’s writing proficiency expectations during other writing activities, in these practices, students were assigned seats and expected to work only independently and in silence.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>First Day/Staggered schedule/Early assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Finishing up testing; Writing rubric practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October*</td>
<td>Testing for report card; Testing for report card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November*</td>
<td>Finishing up testing for report card; Completing report cards; Report cards sent home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December*</td>
<td>Testing for second report card; Testing for report card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January*</td>
<td>Testing for report card; Finishing up testing for report card; Completing report cards; Report cards sent home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February*</td>
<td>Testing for report card; Testing for report card; Writing rubric practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March*</td>
<td>Testing for report card; Finishing up testing for report card; Completing report cards; Report cards sent home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Writing rubric practice; Writing rubric practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>End of the year assessment; End of the year assessment; Completing report card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Last day/ report card sent home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.1 Timelines for Meeting Formal Assessment Requirements

*1/2 day writing rubric practice

Note: In March and April during morning meetings, students practiced writing known words during a period of ten minutes.
Every nine weeks, Mrs. Boyd was required to send the students’ progress report home. In order to prepare and complete each student’s report card, Mrs. Boyd initiated formal assessment practices about every four weeks (figure 5.1). These practices involved assessing the students’ text reading level, writing vocabulary, word knowledge, ability to hear and record sounds in words, and spelling. The students were tested individually and in small groups. Informal assessment practices such as the analysis of students’ daily work (e.g., writing) and classroom observations were also important sources of information in Mrs. Boyd’s process of completing report cards. For each report card period, Mrs. Boyd always took extra time to write individual summaries with comments about the students’ learning and participation in the classroom. She wrote these comments after school in general over the weekend.

Meeting the district’s assessment requirements and deadline also affected the regularity and type of planned literacy events promoted in the classroom, and the length of thematic units. In order to test periodically a large classroom group, Mrs. Boyd struggled to accommodate time for reading groups within her daily schedule and additional requirements. During assessment periods, she was unable to meet with small groups of students on a regular basis. The length and focus of theme-based units was also affected by the assessment schedule, as well as the time needed to cover the content expected by the district’s course of study.
Assessment Shaping the Identities of Classroom Members

Assessment practices were a central part of Julie Boyd’s literacy curriculum. They supported the implementation of “situated” instructional decisions and actions, which took into account her students’ literacy backgrounds, their family expectations, her curriculum goals, the school’s philosophy and expectations, and the district’s course of study, proficiency standards and assessment requirements. The lenses used as assessment tools reflected a particular understanding of what is literacy learning, and consequently, influenced teaching decisions and the focus of Mrs. Boyd’s literacy curriculum.

To a certain point, these lenses shaped the identities of the teacher, students and their families. At the classroom level, Mrs. Boyd promoted a range of classroom literacy activities, which involved building on reading and writing skills and strategies needed to meet the district’s grade-level proficiency standards. At the same time, the pressure of meeting the district’s assessment requirements changed the classroom’s weekly guiding schedule. These changes reflected not only on the interruption of classroom routines but also on Mrs. Boyd’s communication with families:

... The month of May will find us busy with assessments in reading and math like the ones we did in the fall. There will be 18 different math assessments, nine of which must be done on an individual basis. The reading assessment is a continuation of what we do throughout the school year – the children read to me individually to determine what level they are reading at, there is a sentence dictation as well as a word spree (the children will write as many words as they can in 10 minutes). As you can see is a very time-consuming process due to the large number of individual assessments. I try to plan activities for the rest of the class which do not need my direction. (Letter to families, May 1999)

[Ask me about] ... writing about animals for the last time of the year! We did our writing for the end-of-the-year district assessment Tuesday. We celebrated with cookies on Wednesday. We will still be writing a lot but not about animals (unless we want to). (Ask Me About, April 1999)
[Ask me about] ... it has been a different kind of week. Mrs. [Boyd] ... completed all the individual math assessments this week (there were nine different tests on time, money, patterns, sorting, counting, place value, measurement, fractions and probability). We have also begun some of the tests which can be done as a group — addition and subtraction facts, writing numbers, and story problems. (Ask Me About, May 1999)

[Ask me about] ... finishing up all the assessments. Mrs. [Boyd] ... is really pleased with the progress we have made this year. This week we did some reading assessments which included writing two sentences that we were given and writing as many words as we could in 10 minutes. We have been practicing these things throughout the year and we have really improved. (Ask Me About, May 1999)

The above examples of Mrs. Boyd’s communication with families illustrate the impact of assessment practices in the classroom schedule, her curriculum goals, and teaching focus. Assessment requirements, particularly proficiency standards, also reflected on the families’ perception of what represented literacy learning. For example, after the student-led conferences in February, Derek’s mother shared her concerns about his literacy growth. She saw growth in his reading and writing abilities in comparison to the beginning of the school year but she worried that Derek was still reading at a lower level and far from than the district’s reading proficiency standard for first grade. Over the school year, Bobby’s parents also worried that his reading and writing progress was insufficient to meet the district’s end of the year standards.

Additionally, assessment requirements and proficiency standards reflected on the students’ personal learning goals. Being able to read a chapter book became part of their “peer culture” (Corsaro, 1985). Taking into account students’ individual needs and abilities, Mrs. Boyd shared with them some of the school expectations of where they needed to be at the end of the school year. For example, as the year progressed, she
reinforced the importance of taking risks and reading books in the classroom and at home, and the importance of writing longer stories (at least four sentences) not forgetting space between words, appropriate use of capital and lower case letters.

The district’s commitment to proficiency standards for the primary grades presented contradictions and tensions with the school’s tradition and Mrs. Boyd’s experience in implementing a child-centered and developmental program. Meeting proficiency standards required a different frame of reference, that is, the expectation that all children would be reading at level 14 or meeting writing proficiency standards at the end of the year in contrast to an understanding that “children learn at different rates and in different ways” (Student progress report, 1994). As a schoolwide effort, Highwood incorporates a developmental view of instruction and assessment that support children’s differences. Although the state’s Model Competency-Based Language Arts Program (1992) also incorporates a developmentally view of appropriate instruction, it focuses “on learner achievement of the specified performance objectives in composition and reading” (p.2). Further, it does not specify a developmental understanding of assessment. Assessment is perceived as informal and formal, that is, designed to support instruction (and make decisions about individual student achievement) and to inform accountability, respectively. In this sense, for Mrs. Boyd, meeting the district’s competency-based education program required accommodating different perspectives on what counts as developmental instruction and assessment.

By tracing assessment practices, I showed how they were co-constructed and situated within multiple layers of contexts. Assessment was a central part of Julie Boyd’s
literacy curriculum. Formal and informal assessment practices provided systematic information about the students’ knowledge, growth and progress. They informed her teaching and provided resourceful ways of researching and gathering reliable information on the students. Nevertheless, the range of assessment practices used over the school year was determined by multiple factors: Mrs. Boyd’s theoretical and practical understanding of literacy learning; the school’s philosophy and authentic assessment practices; and the district’s (and state’s) competency-based program and its assessment requirements. In this sense, not only local decisions made by Mrs. Boyd but also the district’s (and state’s) perspectives on assessment affected the nature of classroom assessment practices. Consequently, opportunities for literacy learning and teaching were also shaped and constrained in order to accommodate the assessment schedule and expectations set by proficiency standards (as defined by each layer of context).

"They’re a singing bunch": The Co-Construction of a “Songs and Poems” Curriculum to Promote Literacy Learning and Teaching

In this section, I examine the multi-layered and co-constructed context that shaped classroom opportunities for literacy learning and teaching through a piece of Julie Boyd’s literacy curriculum; that is, her use of songs and poems. Over the school year, Mrs. Boyd introduced a variety of songs and poems in the classroom. Although for many years Mrs. Boyd had used songs and poems as a tool to promote literacy learning and teaching, she had not used them as intensively as during this school year. They became an important
part of the curriculum because of the students’ positive response and interest. In addition, Mrs. Boyd’s decision to include more songs and poems in the literacy curriculum reflects her theoretical and practical understandings of literacy learning and teaching (e.g., a child-centered and literature-based approach to literacy learning, and prior experiences using poems and songs); a high number of students who did not see themselves as readers and writers; and the district’s course of study and new reading proficiency standards for first and second grade levels.

When I examine the use of songs and poems as a teaching and learning tool by tracing its life across the contexts, I can see how it both supported students’ interests and accommodated the different agendas and expectations embedded within four layers of context: (1) the classroom, (2) the family, (3) the school, and (4) district/state. Unlike the assessment practices, the tracer goes from inside the classroom, a piece of the curriculum which was co-constructed by the teacher and students, to outside layers of context. That is, a piece of the curriculum which negotiated and accommodated school and district’s objectives and goals, as well as promoted school-home links. Thus, looking first in the classroom, I will show how “songs and poems” became part of the history of the classroom community and its identity. In fact, later in the year, Mrs. Boyd identified the group to their families as a “singing bunch.” The use of songs and poems was grounded in Mrs. Boyd’s theoretical and practical understandings of the nature of literacy learning and teaching and child development, and the students’ interest and response. It supported the school’s child-centered and developmental approach to learning, and the mission to develop a community of learners. Mrs. Boyd’s use of songs and poems aimed at
accommodating the objectives of the district's language arts course of study, and meeting the district's new proficiency standards and focus on reading proficiency (as a response to low fourth-grade reading proficiency scores and state legislation on a fourth-grade reading guarantee). Mrs. Boyd's aim of promoting her students' interest and positive response to songs and poems also became official as part of her required school/district year goals and objectives. Further, the use of songs and poems as a piece of the literacy curriculum supported the development of school-home links.

The timeline at the bottom of figure 5.2 shows the chronology of Mrs. Boyd's classroom history as a "singing bunch" from the beginning until the end of the school year. Below I examine the development of this history, which was shaped and fostered by four layers of context (the classroom, school, district and family contexts).
### District and School Contexts
- District's Course of Study
- Reading and writing proficiency standards
- School Philosophy
- 1998-99 goals and objectives

### School-Home Links
- "Ask me About..." letter.
- Some of the children sing classroom songs at home.
- Poems used in the classroom are sent home.

### Parent Informational Night
- Teacher gives an overview of her literacy program and expectations.

### Classroom Community
- "They're a singing bunch" (as described by the teacher)
- Students enjoy singing the Pizza song. Some students express concern for not knowing how to read and/or write.
- Teacher decides to bring more songs and poems to the classroom considering (1) the students' response to singing, (2) low reading and writing scores, and (3) students who were apprehensive for not knowing how to read or write.
- Teacher includes new songs and poems in her teaching plans. She uses a large selection of poems, which relate to their thematic units or special events. Poems and songs vary in terms of their level of difficulty.

### Classroom Interactions
- First Day of School: Learning the Pizza Song. Singing in different contexts (meeting area, free choice play and work time, school hallway).
- Students enjoy singing the Pizza song. Some students express concern for not knowing how to read and/or write.
- Teacher decides to bring more songs and poems to the classroom considering (1) the students' response to singing, (2) low reading and writing scores, and (3) students who were apprehensive for not knowing how to read or write.

### School Community
- Literacy Night: K-2 planning effort that involved the teachers, interns, principal, and parents.
- Book of poems sent home during their Snow unit.
- Literacy Night: Families observe and participate in an introduction to literacy events defined as common practice by all first grade teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prior to School Year</th>
<th>August</th>
<th>September/October/November/December</th>
<th>January</th>
<th>February-June</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Figure 5.2 Co-Constructing Literacy Learning and Teaching through the Use of Songs and Poetry**
The Use of Songs and Poems in Classroom Interactional Spaces

Mrs. Boyd introduced The Pizza Song in the first day of school for each of the three groups of students in the school's early staggered schedule. In prior years, Mrs. Boyd had used the pizza song with former kindergarten and first-grade students.

Although her primary purpose in using the pizza song in the first day of school was to promote a warm and welcoming environment, the activity also created opportunities for literacy learning and teaching. In episode 5.1 below, Mrs. Boyd introduces the pizza song to her first group of students.

Episode 5.1 (FN and AT, August 1998)²

It is around 10:30 am. Mrs. Boyd and her first group of students (Karla, Laurie, Ellen, Bobby, Alice, Edward, Juanita, Jack, Tracy, John, Shelley and Nathan) return to the classroom after a brief recess in the playground. Mrs. Boyd takes the students to the meeting area. She sits at a small chair next to a stand holding large charts. The Pizza Song is the one on display:

I know a food that
Starts with P,
And pizza is its name - O,
P-i-z-z-a, p-i-z-z-a, p-i-z-z-a
And pizza is its name - O.

The students sit on the floor facing Mrs. Boyd. She asks how many of them know the song Bingo. Students stand hands. She explains that they are going to sing a song that's like Bingo. As she points to the chart, Mrs. Boyd asks them what they think is the food in the drawing. Bobby says, "Pizza." Mrs. Boyd asks him how he figured it out, and Bobby responds, "That's because of the pepperoni." Mrs. Boyd reads and sings it softly, and some students start to sing it along with her. She explains that they will need to clap the other times they sing it. She asks them to count the letters the word pizza has, and explains how many times they will need to clap. She explains that each time they sing it, they will have to clap for one more letter until they will clap five times for all the letters in the word pizza. They all sing it together.

² See adopted transcription conventions in Appendix A.

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In episode 5.1, students were exposed to opportunities for literacy learning and teaching within a relaxed interaction. For example, some students had difficulty matching their clapping with the letters of pizza, which they learned as they sang it or in new singing opportunities in the first days of school. Other students had difficulty matching word by word as they followed Mrs. Boyd pointing through the words in the chart while singing. Some students were able to identify high frequency words such as I, a, is and and. The majority of the students were exposed to new vocabulary, and the pizza song provided an opportunity for some to learn how to spell or to identify the word pizza.

The students, especially the first and third group, enjoyed the Pizza song. They asked Mrs. Boyd to sing it again during their first school day, as well as to sing it at different times during their first days of school as a whole group. After three days of intensive testing in the first week of school, Mrs. Boyd was concerned with students' low scores in reading and writing assessments (see table 4.2, p.174). In addition, after interacting with students, she was surprised that many of them were apprehensive about learning how to read and write, and did not see themselves as readers or writers. Taking into account her prior teaching experience using songs and poems, the students' interest and low assessment scores, and the district's new reading proficiency standard, Mrs. Boyd decided to bring more simple poems and songs to the classroom, which would help students learn about reading because of the rhythm and pattern of poems, as well as learn how to spell new words. More importantly, she saw poems and songs as providing a non-threatening experience in which students at different reading levels could feel successful.
Songs and poems were first introduced during shared reading events. Early in the school year, Mrs. Boyd introduced simple poems such as Red and Blue, which helped some students learn how to spell red and blue.

R-E-D spells red, B-L-U-E, B-L-U-E
R-E-D spells red, That spells blue, That
Apples, tomatoes, and cherries, too Spells blue. That’s the color of the sky.
R-E-D spells red. That’s the color of the sea.
Adapted from “Farmer in the Dell” B-L-U-E, B-L-U-E
Adapted from “Are you Sleeping”

These songs and poems were written on large charts, which stayed on display in the classroom on a display chart (see classroom map in chapter 4, figures 4.9 and 4.10). After learning a new poem and/or song, students read and/or sang them in quiet reading events (during quiet work time or quiet work choice time), and used them as point of reference in independent writing events during quiet work time. The use of songs and poems, as opportunities for literacy learning and teaching, was co-constructed at individual and collective levels, that is, not only through interactions between teacher and student(s), and among students, but also through individual students’ interactions with classroom materials.

During shared reading events, new poems and/or songs were frequently introduced or old ones were re-read. Mrs. Boyd used display charts or overhead transparencies to introduce new poems and songs. Some poems did not have a tune to go with it and they were just read. Over the school year, a variety of poems and songs were introduced based on thematic units being implemented or special events. For example,
Mrs. Boyd introduced different poems on dinosaurs (e.g., *The Dinosaurs: Where, Oh, Where Has My Dinosaur Gone?* and *Ten Big Dinosaurs*) and St. Patrick's Day (e.g., *Look Out!* and *Happy St. Patrick's Day*).

**The Dinosaurs**

The dinosaurs lived so long ago
What happened to them we do not know!
Some were tall,
And some were small.
They lived in the water,
And on the land.
The stegosaurus had big plates of bone
On its tail and back.
The brontosaurus had a long, long neck
And a tail that could give you a WHACK!
But the meanest dinosaur of all, no doubt,
Was the tyrannosaurus rex! Watch it!

**Look Out!**

Look out here they come
Little men in green.
St. Patrick's Day will soon be here
And they will soon be seen.

When learning new poems in shared reading events, Mrs. Boyd took the lead.

Students attempt to read as she introduced them, and were actively involved during re-readings and/or singing. For example, during their Dinosaur unit in March, Mrs. Boyd introduced *Ten Big Dinosaurs* using the overhead projector.

**Ten Big Dinosaurs**

One big, two big, three big dinosaurs,
Four big, five big, six big dinosaurs,
Seven big, eight big, nine big dinosaurs,
Ten big dinosaurs!
They all lived a long, long time ago.
They all lived a long, long time ago.
They all lived a long, long time ago.
Now there are no more. [changed to “Some still live today!”]

As Mrs. Boyd introduced this poem, students attempted to read along. She explained that it went with the tune of the *1 Little, 2 Little, 3 Little Indians* song, and asked them to sing
it with her. They sang it twice, and some students demonstrated a lot of excitement. After they sang it for the second time, one student questioned the validity of one of the poem’s sentences (“Now they are no more”). Mrs. Boyd agreed that is not a true statement based on what they had learned about dinosaurs. She suggested that they re-write the sentence, and they brainstormed together a new sentence (“Some still live today!”). Mrs. Boyd crossed the original sentence on the transparency with a marker, and wrote underneath their new sentence. She asked them why the new sentence worked, and had them count and compare the number of syllables in the old and new sentence. As illustrated in this example, students were actively involved during shared reading events involving poems and songs. These events also provided an opportunities for reading and re-reading, and to confirm and expand their prior knowledge (e.g., on what they had learned about dinosaurs), and learn new concepts (e.g., syllables).

During quiet reading events, students initiated and carried on the reading and/or singing of poems. Students also enjoyed the listening center in which they could listen to tapes (in many cases, songs) of books read or sang in shared reading events (e.g., Dig A Dinosaur by Norma L. Gentner; Silly Sally by Audrey Wood; and Chicka Chicka Boom Boom by Bill Martin, Jr. and John Archambault). In addition, the students often requested Mrs. Boyd to re-read or sing books with rhymes and repetition of language patterns such as Dig A Dinosaur, Silly Sally, The Big Toe (Melser & Cowley, 1990), and Meanies (Cowley, 1990).
Mrs. Boyd used poems for reading and writing activities developed during quiet work time. For example, during their first thematic unit on Insects, Mrs. Boyd introduced the poem I One It in shared reading.

I one it
I two it
I three it
I four it
I five it
I six it
I seven it
I eight it
Oh, so you ate the old black bug!

After re-reading it at different times, Mrs. Boyd developed two activities, each with a different handout of the poem (see copy of these handouts in Appendix L). One handout aimed at providing an opportunity for students to practice high frequency words (i.e., it and the). Students were expected to fill out a series of blanks with missing words in the poem (i.e., it, the, and bug) and draw a picture of a bug. In the second handout, Mrs. Boyd asked students to read, illustrate and write numbers by the correct line (e.g., I one it -1). Students were also asked to re-read the poem to Mrs. Boyd or another adult. These activities aimed at students who had a limited writing vocabulary, who did not have word-by-word matching, and did not understand the concept of word and letters, and did not know the numbers. These activities also aimed at integrating the math concepts, and their thematic unit on Insects.

The same poem, I One It, was also used for an activity available during quiet work choice time. Mrs. Boyd had the words of the poem written in small cards, and a display
chart with pockets, and a handout of the complete poem. In this activity, students matched the individual cards with the words in the poem by re-writing it with the cards displayed in separate pockets on the chart. Students also had the option of using a pointer to read the poem after completing it on the display chart. In the beginning of the school year, this activity was too difficult for some of the students and appropriate for others. In this sense, Mrs. Boyd addressed the students' different ability levels by providing varied activities. During quiet work time, students were asked to re-read a variety of poems and draw a picture based on the story. They were also asked to re-read it to a classmate, and they took the poems home. Later in the year, they also had the opportunity to re-read a poem to students from a different classroom.

Over the school year, the use of songs and poems involved a range of literacy practices: letter and word recognition, repetition of language patterns, spelling simple words, paying attention to word chunks and word families, learning new words, re-reading, reading for fluency, reading comprehension, and trying to spell new words. It took place in particular planned literacy events (i.e., shared reading and/or singing, quiet reading and independent writing events), either teacher or child initiated, and teacher or child led.

**Implementing the School Philosophy**

Mrs. Boyd’s decision to include more songs and poems in her literacy curriculum was guided by a child-centered and developmental perspective on learning and teaching consistent with the school’s philosophy. In other words, she took into account her
students' wide range of literacy backgrounds, their feelings about reading and writing, and their interests. She saw poems and songs as providing opportunities for students at all levels to be successful, while, at the same time, encouraging them to take risks to expand their knowledge. Mrs. Boyd’s use of poems and songs illustrates her child-centered and developmental approach, which is grounded in her fourteen years as a teacher at Highwood elementary.

Mrs. Boyd’s use of a variety of poems and/or songs was also guided by her understanding of literacy learning and teaching as best promoted within a literature-based curriculum and authentic language experiences, which was consistent with the school’s philosophy. In addition, poems were used to promote interaction between students within the classroom and from different classrooms, and encourage the development of a community of learners, which was consistent with the mission of Highwood elementary.

As part of the school’s effort to promote family involvement, the k-2 teachers organized a Literacy night or the Snowball Express in January. This special event was jointly organized and carried on by the k-2 teachers, interns, principal and other teaching faculty. It illustrates the collaborative relationship among the teaching faculty, which supported new opportunities for literacy learning and teaching (as I describe in detail in the school-home links section below).

Accommodating District’s Goals and Requirements

Since before school started, a major concern for Mrs. Boyd was how to support her students’ literacy learning taking into account the district’s proficiency requirements
(especially the new reading standard for first grade level) and the state's mandate on a fourth grade reading guarantee. Mrs. Boyd's first graders were part of the first group of students in the state who will be affected by the fourth grade reading guarantee. After administering the district's early CBE testing, Mrs. Boyd was also concerned with the large number of low scores and how many students were apprehensive about not knowing how to read and write. Including more songs and poems was a way to support students' enjoyment of reading as well as to build early and high level reading strategies, knowledge of rhyming words and word families, word vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension.

The use of songs and poems was in agreement and followed objectives of the district's language arts course of study. For example, included under the district's course of study objectives and sample activities suggestions were:

[Reading objectives] ... Read and discuss poetry, stories, and informational texts to develop appreciation of genre. ... [Sample activities] ... Have students keep literature logs, poetry folders, participate in discussions and act out through skits and drama.

[Writing objectives] ... Identify relationships among and between words. [Sample activities] ... develop relationships between beginning sounds and clusters, rhyming words, word families, webbing, thematic vocabulary, etc.

[Listening/visual literacy objectives] ... Identify and discuss a poem/rhyme, story, or informational piece. ... [Sample activities] ... Have students maintain a poetry notebook. (English/Language Arts Course of Study for Grade One)

In addition, later in the first month of school, Mrs. Boyd's decision to include more songs and poetry became part of her required school/district year goals and objectives. As explained by the school administration, "Two goals should address student achievement, and a third might be a personal goal" (Staff notes, September 1998). She
defined two goals for the year, goal 1 focused on literacy, and goal 2 focused on math. Under each goal, she had to specify objectives and procedures. To include more songs and poetry was one of Mrs. Boyd’s three objectives under her literacy goal for the school year.

Goal 1: To create a classroom environment that continues to support children as readers and writers.

Objective 3: To include more songs and poetry
   Procedure: I will search various books, journals, etc. for a variety of songs and/or poetry to use on a frequent basis within my classroom as this group of children seems to really enjoy singing. (1998-99 Goals and Objectives, September 1998)

As required by the district, Mrs. Boyd met with her principal in a special meeting to go over her goals and objectives for the year. Mrs. Boyd’s decision to include their classroom’s use and interest in songs and poems as one of her objectives for the school year illustrates her ability to build on intertextual links between three layers of context: the classroom, school and district. In other words, her objective 3 (or to include more songs and poetry) addressed the district’s requirement and proficiency goals, it was consistent with the school’s philosophy and her practical knowledge, and made official the students’ interests.

Promoting School-Home links: Extending Classroom Literacy Practices

Early and during the school year, Mrs. Boyd shared with families in her weekly letter ("Ask Me About") about songs being used in the classroom to support literacy learning.
[Ask me about] … the songs we are learning that are helping us learn to spell red and blue. We also like the pizza song. See if I can sing them to you at home. (September 1998)

[Ask me about] … learning some new songs which help us remember the days of the week or the months. The songs really help us remember things (October 1998)

[Ask me about] … the poem we have been reading called “Black Cat”. A copy of it is in my folder. Please have me read it to you while pointing to the words. Then ask me to act it out. (October 1998)

[Ask me about] … learning some songs and poems about St. Patrick’s Day. When these poems come home, please let me share them with you. (March 1999)

Mrs. Boyd also asked students’ to share specific poems in a few of the assignments suggested in the monthly homework calendar. Handouts of poems used in classroom activities were also sent home during the same week, which provided students with the opportunity to share them with their families. In the winter, Mrs. Boyd put together a book of poems about snow, which was also sent home. These poems involved different levels of difficulty. Some poems involved longer text and new vocabulary, which was appropriate for higher level readers. These poems would require some of the families to read with or for their children.

Besides writing about songs and poems being used in the classroom in their weekly letter and monthly calendar and sending poems home, Boyd also demonstrated to families during a school event how poems and songs were used for literacy learning and teaching in the classroom. During the school’s Literacy night or the Snowball Express (episode 5.2), Mrs. Boyd and the other first grade teachers described and demonstrated types of literacy events implemented in the classroom (e.g., shared reading and interactive writing events). Mrs. Boyd explained that poems and songs provide a comfortable, non-
threatening and successful reading experience for students at different reading levels, and in some cases, reluctant or insecure about their reading.

Episode 5.2  (FN and AT, January 1999)

It is a Tuesday evening in mid January, and a number of families came to school for the Snowball Express night. The families were divided by grade level (k-2). The first grade teachers, many of their students and their families gather in Mrs. Boyd’s classroom space. The children and a few parents sit in the meeting area. The space is packed, and other parents and family members sit around the meeting area on the floor or on small chairs. One of the first grade teachers has just demonstrated how they use big books in the classroom. Mrs. Boyd comes next. She first talks about the reading level the students are expected to be at the end of the school year. Then, she explains how they use word chunks, word family or words that rhyme (e.g., hat, pat, cat, etc.) to help the students figure out words when they are reading, and to help them spell new words in their writing. Mrs. Boyd (MB) adds,

MB  Another good way for rhyming, to get them used to rhyming words and thinking about things like that is, we use a lot of poetry and charts with them. And my guys, I know this year really...

S [one student interrupts MB] Are we gonna sing it?

MB  We’re gonna sing it [MB responds to the student and continues talking to the families] Really like to sing. And a good thing about [poems and charts], with these, they’re short. The kids, it’s something that the kids can memorize easily, it’s not a threat to them because like the kids that are in my class know this now and you’re, the other children will pick it up really quickly because there’s parts of it that they’re just so familiar. It repeats. We use this then too like we might ask someone to come and point out, or point to the word “go.” So that he can find familiar words on it. We might cut it up and have it on word charts where they’re matching the words ... You might talk about how go and snow rhyme but how they’re spelled different.

S [one student adds to MB] No, so.

MB  Yeah, so, you’re right. ... So this is up, this goes to the song of like “Up On The Housetop.” Okay. Do you guys remember like that one from Christmas time? Okay, only this one says, we’re going to read it through for the first time so when we sing it, it’ll help. It says, “Snowflakes are falling on the ground. On our houses and in our town. On my nose and on my ear. Snowflakes are falling everywhere. Oh, Oh, Oh, out we go. Oh, Oh, Oh, in the snow. Making snowmen, Sliding, too. There are lots of things to do.” Okay.

S [one student adds] Snowballs

MB  Snowballs, right. Okay, ready? Mrs. [Boyd] has to get the tune on her head. Hang on. [They all laugh. MB leads the students and sings with them] ...
Good job, you guys. What word, what are the words on this chart that rhyme with go? Yes, D.  

D  There’s snow  

MB  Is there any other word, can somebody else tell me another word?  

S  Go  

MB  P. in the back. What other words rhyme with go and snow?  

P  Oh  

MB  Oh, yeah. ... Too does it, doesn’t it? [MB points to the word]  

Ss  No, no  

MB  No. What rhymes with too?  

S  Boo  

MB  Boo does. What’s on the chart that rhymes with too, that you see? Kim?  

Kim  Do  

MB  Do, right. So again, like I said, you might choose this, do some rhyming words, other rhyming words with the children. ...  

Again it’s non-threatening. ... that’s what is really good about the poems and the charts likes this. Like I said it’s a non-threatening way for the kids to learn and help. They’re learning from each other, if they don’t know the word “had,” somebody else does. After you do it enough times, you know, they [may say] “oh that word is had.” It really does sink in; it just takes a while sometimes. It’s repetition in a lot of different ways as many ways as we can do it and you know, hopefully, it all sinks in one way or another...  

... [One of the first grade teachers reinforces that poems and songs are non threatening because there is something for every child to be successful about. Like a child may know the word “go” and increase his/her confidence for being able to share it with the group] ...  

They’re really are a real singing bunch in the school. And it is a good way. You’re introducing other words; you can talk about the compound words like snow and flakes, and why there is plurals and you can talk about the punctuation marks again. So the charts just add a lot of things that you do with the big book. There is not the pictures or the predictability but there is the shortness, the rhyming and the repetition that really helps the kids with it. So that’s why you see them coming home with poems sometimes in their books. And we’ve asked them like, they’re reading them to other children in the building, and it’s something that’s carried on throughout, you know, in our building, throughout all grade levels. They do poetry a lot in the upper grades too. ...  

... [One of the first grade teachers adds that the students can also use their knowledge of words in poems or songs as a reference point in their writing and reading] ...  

So that’s all just a means to support the children with their reading and their writing. Okay guys, one, [let’s] sing one more. Okay. This one goes to “I’m a Little Teapot.” [MB reads with the children] “I’m a little snowman. Round and fat. I have a broomstick I have a hat. With my friends I play in the snow. But when the sun shines It’s time to go.” You can stand up, we can act this one out ....
By sharing with families (through written artifacts and a special event) about literacy experiences at school, Mrs. Boyd encouraged school-home links and families’ involvement in facilitating new opportunities to extend literacy learning occurring at school. Opportunities for re-reading classroom poems at home supported students’ development of confidence in themselves as readers, fluency, word-by-word matching, vocabulary, word analysis, etc. in a non-threatening way.

Thus, opportunities for literacy learning and teaching through the use of songs and poems evolved within multiple layers of context. It became part of the classroom community’s history as a “singing bunch.” In the classroom, the use of songs and poems took place in different literacy events (shared reading and singing; quiet reading; independent writing) and involved a range of literacy practices, which facilitated non-threatening reading and writing experiences for students at different levels. It was in agreement with the district’s language arts course of study and the school’s child-centered philosophy. It created a space for the teacher to build intertextual ties between her practical knowledge (e.g., child-centered philosophy); the district’s language arts course of study and proficiency requirements; her students’ interests, literacy backgrounds, and needs; the school and district’s required year goals and objectives; and the development of home-school links. By building bridges across layers of context, Mrs. Boyd created space for students to develop confidence as readers and writers in a non-threatening way. In other words, by expanding on the students’ interest and positive response, Mrs. Boyd co-constructed with her students their history as a singing bunch, which supported
opportunities for literacy teaching and learning opportunities at the students’ different levels.

Sitting like a Pretzel: Co-constructing Shared Reading Events

In the prior sections, I traced across multiple contexts and over time the nature of assessment practices, and a piece of the classroom’s literacy curriculum, the use of songs and poems. Although in both cases it was inevitable to address the classroom as a group (with its evolving history as a learning community), in this section, I take a closer, over-time look at the life of the group. Specifically, I trace a major classroom literacy practice, a whole group and planned literacy event called “shared reading.” The shared reading event is a tracer unit that illuminates the teacher’s shifting and multi-faceted interactions with the group.

A central pattern across shared reading events, particularly read alouds, was the co-construction of various types of “intertextual” (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Lemke, 1995) ties between the text being read and discussed, and: classroom members’ frames of reference (e.g., prior knowledge and experiences); their school and classroom experiences; Mrs. Boyd’s practical knowledge and curriculum goals; school activities; the district’s course of study and proficiency standards; and the family and community context. Mrs. Boyd actively made and fostered intertextual links, which promoted opportunities for literacy teaching and learning, supported the implementation of thematic-units, and reinforced and expanded on concepts of other content areas (i.e.,
math, social studies, science and health). At the same time, shared reading events supported the development of social practices and classroom members’ shared knowledge as a classroom community. These events followed specific patterns of organization, including expected behaviors such as “sit like a pretzel on your bottom,” “raise your hand,” and “be a good listener.” Mrs. Boyd also selected literature to address issues related to building a community (e.g., working together, respecting each other’s feelings, sharing and being kind to each other, etc.).

Below I trace episodes of shared reading events over time. I focus on a series of introductions to new text during read aloud. By tracing the nature of Mrs. Boyd’s introductions to shared reading events over the school year, I show the role of intertextual ties in supporting literacy learning and teaching through links between interactional spaces built in the classroom and contexts outside the classroom (i.e., the school, district and state, and family and community contexts). Specifically, I show the role of intertextual links in building and creating (1) opportunities for curriculum development (e.g., the implementation of the district’s course of study), (2) connections with assessment practices, and (3) opportunities for learning at the group and individual level. The notion of intertextual ties implies links among texts, events or contexts, which provide a background to understand the text being read, bridge new content, and reinforce previous content taught. These links were orchestrated by Mrs. Boyd’s skillful teaching and effective use of language as a mediator for teaching and learning.
Creating Opportunities for Curriculum Development

Throughout the school year, shared reading or read aloud events were a central and special activity in the classroom's daily schedule. These events recreated the intimacy of storyreading experiences, which play an important role in the preschool and kindergarten years as well as in many children's experiences at home (Cochran-Smith, 1984). Read aloud also created a comfort place to quiet down as a group after lunch or recess, and before going home after a busy day. It was a place to learn literary language, new vocabulary, reading and writing strategies, fluency, as well as facts about arts, science, social studies, math and health. It was a place where links were made between fictional and non-fictional books and classroom members' lives outside school, their lives in the classroom and school. As the year progressed, it was a place where students brought new discoveries from the school library or a special book from home, and asked Mrs. Boyd to read them to the whole group. It was a place filled with excitement as Mrs. Boyd read and re-read the students' favorite stories. Shared reading events were a priority within the classroom's daily schedule. They took place independent of the requirements of an intensive assessment schedule in the beginning and end of the year, and special activities (e.g., fieldtrip, guest speakers, K.I.S.S. tea day ³, and field day).

Shared reading events allowed a range of opportunities for curriculum development. Shared reading events were used to promote language development (e.g., listening, speaking and responding skills); model ways of problem-solving text (word analysis); make guesses about the content of the book based on picture cues, brainstorm writing ideas based on a the book's cover page or the topic; teach new vocabulary and

³ Kids Invite Someone Special (K.I.S.S.) tea day.
literacy language; provide examples of book illustrations as way of promoting ideas for art projects; etc. These instructional strategies aimed at fostering students’ literacy learning, covering the content defined by the district’s course of study, preparing students for district-wide assessments (such as the writing samples or writing rubric), and supporting the development of a classroom community. For example, as shown in episode 5.3, in the beginning of the school year, Mrs. Boyd’s introduction of new texts involved the reinforcement of basic knowledge about text format (e.g., identifying the title page), and ways of using the cover page (title words and picture) to brainstorm the content of the story. In addition, she selected books on common topics and shared experiences and goals (such as family, friendship, being in first grade) that facilitated classroom members to get to know about each other, and the development of a community. She also spent more time reinforcing behavioral expectations and norms for meeting time. She drew on the children’s prior knowledge and experiences by building intertextual ties during the introduction, while reading, and/or after reading the story.

Episode 5.3 (FN and AT, August 1998)
This is the first day of school for the first group in the staggered schedule. This was their fourth meeting and second shared reading event of the day. The students come back from lunch and outside recess. In line, they follow Mrs. Boyd (MB) to the classroom’s meeting area. She sits on a small chair next to a white board, and students sit on the floor facing her. She picks up a book, *Who’s Who In My Family?* (Leedy, 1995).

MB This is a book () [MB interrupts book introduction]. Shelly. Shelly. Nathan and Alice, can you sit flat too? Even though you’re in the back, I really need you to sit flat on your button. Just move over so that you can see in between people. Shelly, why don’t you move right here? Thank you. … This is a book that is called *Who’s Who In My Family?* [MB shows the book’s cover page]. We all have families, don’t we? You have like your mom, and your dad, and your brothers, and your grandmas and your grandpas. [MB interrupts book reading]. Jack. Jack. No, you picked the spot. You have to stay, you can’t
move. Okay. We’re in meeting now. You don’t move unless Mrs. [Boyd] asks you to. …

In my family, my husband teaches school too. I have a daughter who teaches school. I have a son who’s in college, and I have another son who works for a health care (***) That’s my (family), and two dogs. So that’s my family. So we’re going to find out who’s in this person’s family, and we’re going to talk about your families’ too. So Who’s Who In My Family? and the author is Loreen Leedy [MB turns the page]. Raise your hand and tell me what this page is called in the book?

S  Title
MB  Remember to raise your hand…. Jack.
Jack  Title
S  Title
MB  Title page. Tells you the name of the book again, doesn’t it? Only in the inside. Who’s Who In My Family? [MB turns the page]. There’s another title page. It has two title pages. Sometimes they do that when the pictures don’t come out (***)[MB turns the page]. It says Brooklyn Elementary. What’s the name of our school? Raise your hand. Don’t call out. What’s the name of our school? …

Karla.
Karla  [Highwood]
MB  [Highwood]. Right. So instead of Brooklyn Elementary, if you draw a picture of you in our school. You have a picture of [Highwood]. [MB starts to read the text]

As episode 5.3 illustrates, during the introduction of a read aloud, Mrs. Boyd supported opportunities for curriculum development by making intertextual links within major curriculum goals: the development of a learning community; establishing interactional norms and routines as a framework for teaching and learning experiences; and reviewing, introducing and/or building upon the students’ knowledge and use of conventions of written text. Who’s Who In My Family? (Leedy, 1995) was also read as a prompt for a drawing activity (i.e., to draw a picture of their family), and the activity was used as a source of additional information about the students’ background. These curriculum goals reflected Mrs. Boyd’s theoretical and experiential knowledge of children, learning, teaching and literacy; the school’s philosophy and mission; and the
district’s language arts course of study (see chapter 4 for detailed descriptions). By building intertextual links, Mrs. Boyd not only supported opportunities for teaching but also opportunities for students to use their prior knowledge (e.g., their families, school experience, etc.) as available “texts” which can bridge new understanding and build the context of a new book. Thus, intertextual links supported the implementation of a variety of curriculum goals, which took into account multiple layers of context.

As the year progressed, Mrs. Boyd explored text introductions in new ways. She continued to build on children’s known vocabulary and growing knowledge of literary language to support the reading aloud of new texts in a variety of genres. Mrs. Boyd pointed out differences in book genres, and how by looking at the book covers (i.e., the library coding system) they could identify them as being fiction or non-fiction. Episode 5.4 illustrates Mrs. Boyd’s introduction of a book in the middle of the school year.

Episode 5.4 (AT, February 1999)

It is February, and Mrs. Boyd is implementing a thematic-unit on Penguins as a follow up to their Snow unit. Mrs. Boyd (MB) introduces the book Penguin (Fletcher, 1993) during meeting, in the meeting area, in the afternoon period.

MB Eyes need to be on me guys. Joe. (^^) [MB shows them the side of the book cover] Since ... This has numbers here instead of a letter of the alphabet, what do we know about this book? ...

S Fiction

MB Raise your hand. Raise your hand.

S Fiction

MB Raise your hand. Diane, what do we know about this book?

Diane Non-fiction.

MB It’s non-fiction. Right. Means, that’s a book that’s going to tell us true things about it. The title of this book is “What’s a Penguin doing in a place like this?” [MB shows the book’s cover page] So. ( ). This is interesting. A lot of the stuff we have already shared: about how they don’t fly, and they’re good swimmers, and they have hard flippers instead of wings. [MB turns pages as she speaks and stops at another page] But it says, “They have more feathers than any other birds.
Why would they need more feathers? Why would they need more feathers? Tracy.
[MB shows picture]
Tracy  So they can stay warm.
MB   So that they can stay warm. Right. So that keeps them warm. And they’re saying,
     In a space like that they can have about 300 feathers. That’s a lot. That’s about
     one square inch. It’s an inch on each side. [MB continues to read the book and
     show its pictures] ...

In episode 5.4, Mrs. Boyd reinforces the differences between non-fiction and
fiction books. During the winter, the children began to use more frequently the concept of
non-fiction and fiction books. In this episode, Mrs. Boyd also makes intertextual links
between the new text and information the students had been learning in the Penguin unit,
which covers the district’s course of study content on language arts, science and math. In
this sense, these intertextual links provided a context that facilitated the reading of a new
text. They also expanded on the students’ knowledge about informational texts, and the
habitat and life style of a wild animal (part of their district’s science course of study).
Last, it provided an authentic context to apply their knowledge of math concepts.

During shared reading events, Mrs. Boyd’s selection of books was mainly guided
by the thematic-units being implemented. The books aimed at introducing and expanding
the content being covered on language arts, math, social studies, science and/or health.
For example, in the fall, she used a variety of fiction and non-fiction books to expand
their units on Insects and Shapes. In the winter, she used a variety of books for their units
on Snow, Penguins, Cats and Dinosaurs. Their Dinosaur unit ended in the spring, and was
followed by units on Rainforest and Plants. These books were available for read alouds
and use in the classroom during silent reading or free choice quiet time.

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Early in the school year, Mrs. Boyd used book introductions to model writing strategies in order to prepare students for the district-wide, standardized assessment on writing proficiency. The students were expected to write about a theme (i.e., animals) based on a picture prompt. The picture prompt used was the students’ own drawings.

Over the school year, on a monthly basis, Mrs. Boyd selected a book on animals to read during read aloud as a way of brainstorming ideas for their drawing and story. In the first month of school, Mrs. Boyd carefully selected two books on animals: one for a writing practice, and the other for their final writing sample. She selected the book *The Cow that Went Oink* (Most, 1990) for the writing practice. As episode 5.5 illustrates, she used the cover page (picture and title words) to brainstorm and make guesses about the content of the story. In particular, she identified possible sequences of events within a story, and modeled writing strategies.

Episode 5.5 (FN and AT, September 1998)

Mrs. Boyd (MB) introduces *The Cow that Went Oink* (Most, 1990) in their first meeting in the afternoon period. She stands by the white board. As she brainstorms the content of the story with the group, she writes their answers on the board.

MB So let’s look at this picture. Okay, tell me ( ) tell me from what you see in the picture what do you think this book might be about?
S Cows
Ss Cows
MB Raise your hand. Raise your hands please. Allan.
Allan Cows
MB Is there one cow or is there a bunch of cows?
Ss A bunch of cows.
MB A bunch of cows. Right. Where are, where are the cows at? What can you tell me by looking at the pic –
Ss (***)
MB Raise your hand. Shhh. Ray, where are they at?

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Ray A farm
MB They’re on a farm. What makes you think that might be a farm? ( ) What makes you think that might be a farm, Ray?
Ray (***)
MB I can’t hear Ray because somebody was (talking). What Ray?
Ray Because there was a lot of grass.
MB Because there was a lot of grass. I’m going to write down what you’re telling me about that picture. You said ( ) “There are a bunch of cows.” [MB writes on the white board as she says it]
Ss of [Ss say sentence with MB]
MB Then we said, Ray said, they’re on a field because ... why Ray?
Ray Because
MB Because of the grass. Yeah.
Ray Yeah.
MB You said they’re on a farm, didn’t you?
Ss (***)
MB “They are on a farm in a bunch of grass.” [MB writes as she says the sentence]. We used bunch a couple of times. That’s okay. Okay, what else can you tell me by looking at this picture? [MB continues conversation about the cover page]

Episode 5.5 illustrates the introduction of a book Mrs. Boyd used to model writing strategies to prepare students to write their writing samples for the district’s writing assessment. In episode 5.5, Mrs. Boyd’s introduction helped students identify and discuss a sequence of events within a story. Of importance for the district’s writing assessment was the students’ ability to develop a story (with a simple sequence of events) and use conventions of print (see the district’s writing proficiency criteria in chapter 4, p.109). In this activity, Mrs. Boyd uses a new text to build intertextual links with an assessment practice as well as the district’s expectation of first grade writing. Although the focus of this activity was on the assessment task, the students were also exposed to writing strategies needed to complete other classroom writing assignments and meet course of study content.
Opportunities for Learning at the Group and Individual Level

Following a developmental and child-centered approach to learning, Mrs. Boyd linked and expanded children’s prior knowledge within the context of a new text. In this way, Mrs. Boyd supported the students’ learning by building intertextual ties with their prior knowledge, experiences and interests, and their new experiences in the classroom and at school. Within the context of a group event, Mrs. Boyd facilitated opportunities for learning at the group and individual level. For example, episode 5.6 illustrates Mrs. Boyd’s introduction to an alphabet book, F-Freezing ABC (Simmonds, 1996). In this introduction, she explores children’s knowledge of animals to explore the book’s inside cover page, and she points out language patterns (i.e., rhyming words). One child, Nathan, points out that the author’s name rhymes with rose.

Episode 5.6 (FN and AT, January 26, 1999)
Mrs. Boyd (MB) introduces F-Freezing ABC (Simmonds, 1996) in their shared reading event at the meeting area in the afternoon period.

MB This is called [MB interrupts reading] As soon as everyone is sitting flat. Bob (*) .... F-Freezing ABC. And if you look inside on the in-page there is a pattern to it. Something that you need to look at really close because it’s hard to see. They’re saying things like utch ( ) so there is kind of a rhyme ( ). Raise your hand if you can tell, I, we know what some of the animals are in here. Raise your hand if you can tell me the name of one of the animals…. Tom.
S Bear
Tom A bear
MB Right, there is a bear in this, and Katia.
Katia Cat
S ( )
MB A cat, and Tyler.
Tyler ( )
MB Mrs. [Boyd] wasn’t sure of what that was.
Joe I know what it is, I know what it is. It is a ( )
MB We already said that so you don’t need to scream at me. And this is, Laurie.
Laurie: What?
MB This one down right here. Putting a red scarf with hat.
Laurie Duck
S The duck
MB The duck and the fox.
SS /The duck and the fox./
MB Allan.
SS and the owl.
MB So. ( ) [T interrupts introduction]. Listen. 5-4-3-2-1. Listen please. Listen to the lady’s name. We think about sometimes her name is Pose.
S Posie.
MB Pose. Like a flower Pose.
S ( )
MB Anyway. So
Nathan Like rose.
MB Like rose. It rhymes with rose. [T starts to read the book].

Since the beginning of the year, during interactive writing and independent writing events, Mrs. Boyd had promoted opportunities for looking at words that rhyme. In this example, both Nathan and Mrs. Boyd make intertextual links between concepts (reading and strategies) frequently used in interactive writing events and the next text. By juxtaposing different texts (or contexts), Nathan was able to expand his knowledge of language patterns and written text operates. His example and understanding of rhyming words create an opportunity for other students to make intertextual links and build a context for problem solving a new text.

In the beginning of the school year, read aloud events were primarily teacher directed and controlled although Mrs. Boyd’s decisions and actions took into account students’ interests, background and needs. That is, Mrs. Boyd led the event as well as selected the books to be read. As the year progressed, the students’ participation increased and changed in quality. That is, the students often requested books to be read from the classroom’s and school’s library. They also selected favorite books and interesting topics
from their classroom library to be re-read during read aloud events. Not only the students
started to request books to be read, but they also engaged in more conversation during the
introduction, and during or at the end of the reading of a new book. The students also
brought new books to be shared during read aloud. These books varied in themes, and in
general were related to their theme-based units. For example, during the Dinosaur unit,
Josh brought a big book, Tom brought a book about volcanoes, and Derek brought a
volcano kit. Mrs. Boyd later shared with the families in the weekly “Ask Me About”
letter:

[Ask me about] ... talking about why dinosaurs disappeared. ... [Derek] brought
in a volcano kit to share so we got to watch it happen again. ... [Tom] brought in
a book about volcanoes to share. (Ask Me About, April 1999)

Shared reading events were linked to other classroom routines. Books read in
shared reading events were available in quiet reading and free choice time. Read aloud
also involved students’ sharing their writing. For example, in April, the students
individually shared their stories about animals during meeting time. As previously
mentioned, texts were also used to support the development of a classroom community.
Over the school year, Mrs. Boyd selected books to be read during read aloud which
addressed relationship problems (e.g., knowing how to work together) that some of the
students were having. As Mrs. Boyd shared with families later in the year,

[Ask me about] ... sharing a book, Zinnia and Dot [Ernst, 1992], the story of two
hens who had to learn to share and be friends because a weasel got the all of their
eggs but one when they were fighting about who was the prettiest. We all need to
remember to share and be kind to each other. Some days are easier than others.
(Ask Me About, April 1999)
Building Inter(con)textual Links: Creating Teaching and Learning Opportunities

As the previous examples illustrate, during shared reading events, opportunities for literacy teaching and learning were fostered by Mrs. Boyd’s and the students’ exploration of intertextual links between prior experiences and new knowledge being constructed. As previously illustrated in figure 4.13 (p.205), these opportunities were situated and constituted within a multi-layered context. In other words, Mrs. Boyd’s decision-making and actions were shaped by contexts outside the classroom as well as interactional spaces co-constructed in the classroom. For example, Mrs. Boyd’s selection of books and courses of action during shared reading events were guided by her curriculum goals, which followed and expanded on the district’s course of study and proficiency standards (which, in turn, followed and expanded on the state’s Model Competency-Based Language Arts program, and reading and writing proficiency standards).

During shared reading events, Mrs. Boyd took advantage of teachable moments that addressed not only the district’s course of study for language arts but also for math, science, social studies and health. In agreement with the school’s philosophy, literacy was regarded as “of primary importance because it is the means by which other learning often occurs” (Student Progress Report Parent Handbook, 1995). The selection of books to be read during read aloud supported the implementation of a literature-based and integrated approach. Each new thematic unit involved a large selection of children’s literature on its topic, in a variety of genres. At the same time, Mrs. Boyd’s decisions and actions during shared reading events supported the school’s developmental and child-centered approach
to learning. She expanded on the students’ prior knowledge, ability levels, experiences and interests. Her decisions and actions took into account the students’ range of backgrounds, as well as curriculum goals and where she wanted to take the group next. Mrs. Boyd’s selection of literature for shared reading events was also dependent on resources available in the classroom, school (the school’s library and other teachers’ books) and community (the public library and the students’ personal or family library).

Despite constraints, guidelines and schedule requirements, Mrs. Boyd retained the power to make decisions and choose appropriate courses of action during shared reading events. Her theoretical and experiential knowledge, frames of reference, and curriculum goals guided the decision making process, which involved negotiation of expectations set by the students’ backgrounds, interests and responses, the evolving classroom community, and contexts outside the classroom (i.e., the school, district and state, and family and community). Mrs. Boyd’s use of a range of teaching strategies during shared reading events evolved throughout the school year. Similarly, the nature of students’ participation during read aloud also changed over time. As the year progressed, intertextual links were made with new knowledge classroom members had acquired as a group.
The story of Derek: "You go to baby rod the 16 level."

[You got to be able to read the 16 level.]

By tracing a piece of the literacy curriculum and a group event, I examined Julie Boyd's decision making and actions addressing the collective. Nonetheless, as previously described, her instructional decisions and actions also took into account the students' individual backgrounds, interests, abilities and needs. In fact, her ultimate goal when interacting at the group or individual level was to promote each student's learning, and development as a reader and writer. The focus of this section is to take a closer look at the literacy learning story of one student in Mrs. Boyd's classroom. I trace Derek's classroom life and experiences outside school to show how his learning was situated and embedded within multiple layers of context. Similarly, Mrs. Boyd's interactions and teaching decisions addressing Derek's learning took into account multiple layers of context: his prior background and interests; his family expectations; her curriculum goals, theoretical and experiential background, and frames of reference; the school's philosophy, history and available resources (e.g., intervention services); and the district's course of study, proficiency and assessment requirements.

By tracing Derek's classroom life, I locate his literacy learning story within the web and ongoing stream of classroom life. Like Mrs. Boyd's decisions and actions, Derek too negotiated multiple layers of context located within the interactional spaces built at the classroom level, and outside the classroom (i.e., his family and community, the school, and the district's proficiency expectations). His identity as a learner, and reader and writer in the classroom was constituted and co-constructed by the interdependence
among multiple contexts. His parents' image of what constituted literacy learning was also situated and co-constructed within multiple layers of context. In this sense, it is necessary to take an over time look across contexts to understand what becomes constituted as one story of literacy learning.

In the following sections, I trace Derek's learning story by looking at (1) his life as a first grader, (2) his learning experiences outside school, (3) his family concerns and involvement, and (4) his interactions and relationship with Mrs. Boyd. Figure 5.3 briefly summarizes the range of Derek's experiences in the classroom, and at home and school over time. As I show in the next sections, Derek's literacy learning was influenced and shaped by his prior knowledge, personal goals and interests, his parents' involvement in school and classroom activities, his relationship with Mrs. Boyd, his participation at the ERI program, his involvement in Cub Scout and other important events in his life.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Grade Year</th>
<th>Home</th>
<th>Derek's Experiences Classroom</th>
<th>School/ District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Fall**         | - Background experiences and interests: following "how to do" manuals and putting things together; science; nature; arts; etc.  
- Parents concerned with his literacy development after receiving his early assessment scores, and being notified about his referral to ERI. They share concerns about the fourth-grade proficiency test.  
- Regularly completing his classroom and ERI homework assignments.  
- The topic of his conversations with his parents about school focused on new friends and their play during outside recess or lunch.  
- Derek joined Cub Scout.  
- During his grandmother's visit, he read an ERI book to her.  
- He received for birthday gift a radio to put together with his father.  
- Homevisit from Mrs. Boyd and Malu.  
- Before Christmas, he was involved with his family in writing his gift list and signing cards. | - Being tested in reading, writing and math in his first day of school.  
- Developing friendships and a relationship with Mrs. Boyd.  
- Long bathroom breaks before starting individual assignments (especially writing assignments). Re-reading same book many times during quiet reading time.  
- Active participation in classroom meeting discussions, and science and art projects.  
- Favorite things (all year): playing with math tubs, playing games in the computers, and talking about his outside school experiences.  
- Sharing Cub Scout uniform with Mrs. Boyd, classmates and Malu.  
- Taking home personal notes from Mrs. Boyd (e.g., thank you notes).  
- Present with his mother at the Parent informational night.  
- Fieldtrip to the supermarket with his class and a group of parents (including his mother)  
- Finishing up assignments quickly in order to play with the math tubs, especially the interlocking cubes.  
- Realizing that words are made out of letters. Writing longer stories and attempting new words.  
- Student-led conference – setting up reading and writing goals with Mrs. Boyd and his mother for the rest of the school year.  
- More interest in quiet reading time, and attempting to read different books.  
- Bringing his new Cub Scout book to the classroom.  
- Bringing a volcano experiment, which was used in the classroom's rainforest unit.  
- Reaching reading goal, and developing sense of confidence as a reader for being able to read a chapter book. Writing more elaborate stories and attempting to write new words.  
- More interest in reading different books in the classroom. | - Mixed feelings about school.  
- Low scores in the early reading and writing assessments.  
- Referral to the school's Early Reading Initiative (ERI) program. Being part of a group of 5 students being served by the ERI pull out program.  
- Developing friendships in the playground, and specials (e.g., arts, gym, library).  
- Participation in PTA events (e.g., Skate party)  
- Present with his classroom and other classrooms at the presentation of a guest speaker (i.e., a Bee specialist). |
| **Winter**       | - Regularly completing his classroom and ERI homework assignments.  
- When talking about school experiences with his parents, he started to focus on classroom activities.  
- Realizing that words are made out of letters.  
- Parents excited about his growth in reading.  
- Meeting Cub Scout goals – reading and memorizing parts of a book, and having it be read by different adults at home and at school.  
- Valentine day: signing cards for his classmates. | - School is a more comfortable place  
- Participation in PTA events (Skate parties)  
- Graduating from ERI program  
- Participation in reading group meetings with students from Mrs. C's first grade classroom  
- Fieldtrip to the city's conservatory with his class, two second grade classrooms, and a group of parents (including his mother).  
- Guest speaker/ focus: rainforest  
- Participation in PTA events (e.g., Spring festival)  
- End of the year assessments: Reached the district's reading proficiency standard; did not reach the district's writing proficiency standard.  
- Last days of school: participation in ERI with a group of 5 students, who were also reading at grade level, to enhance reading skills. |
| **Spring**       | - Regularly completing his classroom and ERI homework assignments.  
- Starting to read chapter books.  
- Parent share concerns about the fourth-grade reading proficiency test.  
- Parents' goals: to review information learned during the school year, read books, take part in a play directed by his mother, camp with his family, etc.  
- One of Derek's goals for the summer: to teach his younger brother about kindergarten and first grade | - -  
- -  
- -  
- -  
- -  |
| **End of the year/ Summer plans** | - -  
- -  
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Figure 5.3  Intermingling Contexts: Brief Overview of Derek's Experiences at Home, School and in the Classroom
Derek’s Life as a First Grader

When asked to write a letter to kindergartens about first grade, in one of the last days of school, Derek wrote about things he liked to do; that is, gym and the climbing wall, and his favorite math tub, the interlocking cubes (copy of Derek’s writing in Appendix M). He also wrote about things he did in first grade (i.e., work on math computers, and do work). Nevertheless, he did not forget to include in his letter the reading level (level 16) that first graders are expected to read next year. Over the school year, being able to read at level 14 (the reading proficiency standard set by the district for the present year) became a personal, family and teacher goal in Derek’s life as a first grader.

Derek seemed well adjusted and comfortable with school and classroom routines and activities since the beginning of the year. However, at home, he shared mixed feelings about going to school, and continued to complain about it during his first month in school. As his mother wrote,

[Derek] ... tells us that he does not want to go to school because it is boring and he has to do “work.” [He] ... is also concerned because his favorite friends from kindergarten are in other classes and a child he “clashed” with will be with him again. He tends to be shy with his peers until they seek him out. ... Deep down inside I think he loves the social aspect of school and he loves to “show off” new knowledge at home. (He can’t wait to try out the new climbing wall — ironic because he has a mild fear of heights) [underlines and parentheses in the original] (Response to Parent Survey, August 1998)

Making friends was a concern for Derek during the first months of the year. He interacted with a variety of students in the classroom, and other school activities. During free choice time, he started to establish closer relationships as he played with the interlock tubs,
looked over a classmate who was playing at the games computer, shared his handmade flashlight with Nathan, or talked about his Cub Scout experiences.

Derek’s scores in the early reading and writing assessments were within the lowest in his classroom (see table 4.2, p.174). He was referred to the school’s Early Reading Initiative (ERI) program. Every morning, he left the classroom with a group of four other students. They stayed at the ERI program’s room for half-hour. In general, Derek was out of the classroom between part of the morning choice activities and the beginning of meeting time.

Reading children’s literature and writing were not in Derek’s list of favorite things to do. Although Derek had access to books at home, and often used procedural books or manuals as well as computer games, he did not see himself as a reader in the beginning of the school year. Early in the school year, Derek was reluctant to write. He took long bathroom breaks before writing assignments during quiet work time. During quiet reading, he was hesitant at attempting to problem-solve words in a new text, and he often re-read the books he was using in ERI. Derek constantly participated and contributed in classroom conversations. He often volunteered to answer questions especially when related to science and math content. For example, as Mrs. Boyd describes, he actively participated in group conversations during the Penguin unit:

“[Derek] is enjoying this unit – his knowledge about penguins is amazing and he doesn’t hesitate to make sure I have all the facts straight or to verbalize it in another way.” (Dialogue journal, February 1999)
Derek also enjoyed talking and sharing about his extra school activities. In our conversations, he liked sharing about his experiences working with his father at the family’s copy shop, and his Cub Scout activities.

When asked if he liked to read and write, Derek was open about not liking these activities even despite his progress at the end of the school year. Learning to read and write in order to achieve school proficiency standards was mostly a family goal for Derek. He set goals and celebrated his progress with his parents. For example, later in the winter, he shared his conversation with his mother about his graduation from the ERI program.

“I’m ahead on reading now. My mom said that I’m the only one that can read a book [in my reading group] and that my reading teacher told her that I’ll be out of reading group soon” (AT, March 1999)

In the winter, Derek was able to make sense about the relationship between words and letters. He realized that words are made of letters. For his mother, this realization was the turning point in his literacy learning in first grade. He became more motivated to attempt to read new books, as he understood better how written text operates. At the same time, at the classroom community level, being able to read a chapter book became an important sign of status within the students’ “peer culture” (Corsaro, 1985). Being able to read a chapter book became an important goal to Derek. As his mother explained, “To him, those were real books ... They’re not those little baby books” (AT, June 1999).

During his student-led conference with Mrs. Boyd and later with his mother, he set as his reading goal to read chapter books. He realized that in order to be able to read a chapter book and reading at first grade level, he needed to work on reading.
In reading, I would like to get better at reading chapter books. We [Mrs. Boyd and Derek] talked about how he’d need to know more words. He feels better about reading now. [in italics what Mrs. Boyd wrote with Derek]
With your parents, set a goal for reading. What can you do at home to help reach this goal? Read “The Cat in the Hat” once every night. We would like to read a chapter book by the end of the year. (Student-led Conference form, February 1999; in italics what Derek’s mother wrote with him)

During the student-led conferences, he also set goals for writing with Mrs. Boyd and his mother.

In writing, I would like to get better at make me know the sounds easier this would help me spell new words. [in italics what Mrs. Boyd wrote with Derek]
Set a goal for writing with his parents. How can you accomplish this goal? We would like to know some new words by the end of the year and remember to put spaces in between the words. (Student-led Conference form, February 1999; in italics what Derek’s mother wrote with him)

Learning how to read only became Derek’s personal goal when he was required to read and memorize a sequence of paragraphs in his Cub Scout book. He read and repeated them at home and at school. He also asked Mrs. Boyd to read a story from his Cub Scout book to the whole group during a shared reading event.

According to Derek, he learned a lot in first grade. In the last days of school, he was proud to share that he was reading his seventh chapter book.

“I’m reading chapter books now ... I finished one yesterday” (AT, May 1999).

Nevertheless, when I asked if he liked to read, he answered quickly and emphatically:

Ah ... ah no, no. I don’t like to read. No. (AT, May 1999)
Derek’s Learning Experiences Outside School

Derek’s favorite thing to do outside school was to help his father in their copy shop. He wanted to be a “copier fixer” just like his father was. During the summer prior to first grade, Derek enjoyed camping, fishing, swimming, biking and spending time with neighborhood friends. He also spent a lot of time with his younger brother, and enjoyed teaching him about things he knew. Derek enjoyed playing computer games at home, and putting things together by himself (e.g., Legos) or with his father (e.g., putting together his birthday gift — a radio; helping or observing his father fix a copy machine at their print shop; learning how to make a handmade flashlight; etc.). He attended Sunday school and Adventure Club (a church program which involved choir practice), and in the fall, he joined Cub Scouts.

According to his mother, Derek had a variety of interests outside school. She saw as his strengths, his interest and knowledge of spatial or mechanical learning, math, nature, and tools.

[Derek] excels at any type of spatial or mechanical learning. He seems to enjoy numbers (math); especially enjoying money! He is fascinated by nature — weather, the animal world, all natural sciences. He loves using any type of tools (except pencils, crayons, etc ...)” (Response to Parent Survey, August 1998).

In November, during the homevisit Mrs. Boyd and I made to Derek’s house, he was excited to share his new Lego toys. He showed the elaborate cars that he enjoyed putting together by looking at the pictures and following the directions. During the school year, Derek was an important participant in Mrs. Boyd’s science lessons. For example, during the Penguin unit, he actively contributed to classroom discussions of Penguins’ habitat
and characteristics. In the Rainforest unit, he brought to the classroom his volcano kit, which was used as part of a whole group experiment led by Mrs. Boyd.

Derek enjoyed sharing at school things he brought from home. Later in September, Derek brought to school a handmade flashlight. He explained that his dad made the flashlight for him. He told me that his dad knows a lot about electricity and he teaches him about it. In September, Derek joined Cub Scout. He was proud to come to school with his new uniform. He told me that his grandmother bought it for him. He also shared that during his grandmother’s visit, he read her a book, The Ghost (Cowley, 1983), which was from the ERI program.

At home, throughout the school year, Derek regularly completed his classroom and ERI homework with his parents. He also was exposed to a range of reading and writing experiences at home (e.g., writing a gift list during Christmas, reading a book to his father, teaching his younger brother about first grade, etc.). Derek saw reading as being necessary in his father’s work so that he could read manuals as he fixed copiers. He was proud to tell me that his mom knew a lot about school and reading. Nevertheless, when I asked if he liked to read or write, he said no. It might be that within the context in which the question was asked, Derek translated “read” and “write” with “school work.” However, at home and his community, Derek was “literate” in a variety of ways considering his use of language and ability to use a variety of discourses. In the classroom, he was proud to share his “literacies” (Gee, 1989), particularly in science, which contributed to his individual learning as well as to the history of his classroom community.

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Family Concerns and Involvement

In the beginning of the school year, Derek’s mother described Derek to Mrs. Boyd as a smart child and with good listening skills, but who did not want to apply his skills to books. She thought he was good in math and mechanics, and could pick up on instruments when he was listening to music (i.e., “that’s a violin, that’s a viola”).

Responding to Mrs. Boyd’s parent survey, Derek’s mother pointed out her perception of Derek’s major strengths:

[Derek] ... excels at any type of spatial or mechanical learning. He seems to enjoy numbers (math); especially enjoying money! He is fascinated by nature – weather, the animal world, all natural sciences. He loves using any type of tool (except pencils, crayons, etc ...). He is highly independent and seems to need to "test" authority before offering his respect. He has been in a school situation for 3 full years (2 preschool - 1 kind.) and believes in the importance of “being a good kid” in school. He is generally happy and loves a good joke. He also is very creative and really enjoys art class. [underlines in the original] (August 1998)

On the other hand, writing and particularly reading were real concerns for Derek’s parents, who regularly worked with him at home, and followed Mrs. Boyd’s homework calendar, and the ERI’s program homework activities.

His family saw learning to read and write at first grade level as a difficult challenge for Derek. In the beginning of the school year, one of Derek’s parents teaching goals for Mrs. Boyd was to “help him see himself as a reader/writer” (Response to Parent Survey, August 1998). Aware of new proficiency standards and the fourth grade reading guarantee, throughout the school year, his mother worried about the possibility of Derek not passing the fourth grade reading proficiency test.
Early in the school year, Derek's mother was concerned about his low scores in the district’s early assessment, and his referral to the school’s ERI program. She had concerns about how helpful the program would really be for Derek. After being a high school teacher for many years, she worried about the possibility of Derek staying in remedial reading for a long time. She also worried that he would be missing activities he liked such as arts and science. After talking with Mrs. Boyd, she decided to sign the permission for Derek to participate in the ERI program. Mrs. Boyd reinforced that the program would be helpful, and that she tried to arrange her meeting schedule based on the students’ who were in the reading programs (either in ERI in the morning, or in Reading Recovery in the afternoon). She explained to Derek’s mother that the students in the ERI program would miss part of meeting (e.g., calendar and interactive writing) but she tried to rotate their meeting time so that a student would not miss the same thing all the time, and she tried to wait until all students were in the room before reading aloud and giving instructions for morning activities.

In the middle of the school year, Derek’s mother felt that he knew he had a lot of work to do on his reading in order to reach the district’s proficiency standard. Nonetheless, Derek felt that he could do it, and he was always excited to tell his parents when he was able to read at a higher reading level. Derek’s mother felt that he started to make real progress in his reading when he suddenly realized that words are made of letters. She was surprised that he only realized that at that point (in early winter) since he had heard so many times about it at school and at home. Additionally, she felt that it helped Derek to have to read the Cub Scout book. It provided Derek with a different and
more personal reason to learn how to read rather than attending to his parents and teacher's expectations.

Later in the year, Derek's mother commented that Derek's early assessment scores were affected because he did not feel comfortable being tested at his first day in school. Although she disagreed with the staggered schedule, she also regretted not having worked with him over the summer in order to review the content he learned in kindergarten. She saw that it would have helped him remember the kindergarten content, and be better prepared for the testing. At the end of the school year, Derek's mother had planned to work with him and her younger son during the summer. She wanted to give Derek a chance to solidify the information learned throughout first grade so that he would have a better start in second grade.

The reading proficiency testing and the possibility of Derek being retained in fourth grade was a critical concern to his mother throughout the school year, and continued to be at the end of the school year independent of his growth and progress at the end of the year. Derek passed to second grade at a reading level above the district's proficiency standards. Despite it, his mother worried at the possibility of Derek being retained in fourth grade and losing his interest in learning (and in the areas he is good at) especially for having to go over content that he is already competent at. She was also concerned with the consequences of Derek not passing the reading proficiency test not only because of his future in elementary school but also on how being retained could affect his future possibilities. Derek has an October birthday, and she worried that if retained, being older could affect his options at school and college (e.g., playing sports).
The Teacher’s Interactions and Relationship with Derek

Julie Boyd’s interactions with Derek were influenced and expanded by her knowledge of his outside school activities and experiences, as well as his participation in school activities. Mrs. Boyd’s knowledge and consequent understanding of Derek as a student, child, brother, Cub Scout, etc provided a broad understanding of him as a learner, which supported and influenced her classroom interactions. For example, in November, Mrs. Boyd and I visited Derek’s home. We were able to observe his skills in putting complicated structures together with the support of pictures in the manual book. This home visit provided to Mrs. Boyd a broader picture of Derek as a learner. She was able to see Derek’s abilities and skills at building structures, and she learned about a range of his activities and interests outside school. Mrs. Boyd’s knowledge of Derek’s interests, abilities and experiences supported the development of a close relationship with him. For example, Derek’s mother commented on the importance of the home visit for him. She mentioned that she could see his “self-esteem thermometer” going up as the visit went on, and he felt happy for being able to show his abilities.

Mrs. Boyd’s instructional goals and decisions in relation to Derek’s literacy learning varied over the school year. In the beginning of the school year, she was concerned that if she pushed too hard, Derek would get “bogged down” and turned off to reading and writing. Her basic goal was to move Derek along by building his confidence as a reader and writer, and at the same time, pushing and teaching him the skills that he needed (e.g., word knowledge). In the fall, Mrs. Boyd worked hard at supporting and challenging Derek’s writing:
The biggest thing with [Derek] is he is capable of letter-sound relationships when writing. He needs to be nudged along. (Journal Writing, October 1998)

In October, Derek’s writing had switched from just strings of letters to trying to use some words and sounds. Mrs. Boyd worked individually with Derek on demonstrating and reinforcing how to hear and record sounds in words. Mrs. Boyd felt that working one-on-one on writing and reading was beneficial and ideal for all the students. Unfortunately, due to other curriculum goals and requirements, she was not able to meet individually as often as she would have liked.

In November, after our homevisit to Derek’s house, Mrs. Boyd felt that it was a good experience. In her reflections about the home visits, she wrote:

“It [the homevisits] does give one so much more insight into a child’s background – what they are bringing with them to school, etc. I believe it gives each of the parents the feeling that the teacher is truly interested in their child and them. It gives on the sense that the teacher is a friend…” (Email communication, December 1998)

Mrs. Boyd felt that the homevisit to Derek made a difference in relation to his participation in the classroom. Despite Derek’s playfulness in the classroom, he also took classroom work assignments seriously.

Over the school year, Derek made significant progress in his reading and writing abilities, as well as his sense of himself as a reader and writer. In the middle of the school year, Derek and Mrs. Boyd set goals for the rest of the year. At this point in the year, Derek and Mrs. Boyd’s reading and writing goals were to be able to read a chapter book, and learn how to better sound out letters in order to be able to spell new words. In March, he graduated from the ERI program. Mrs. Boyd started to meet more often with Derek,
and other students at his level, in small reading groups. Her instructional goal was to support Derek’s reading progress so that he could keep up using and developing his reading strategies in order to read harder books, and meet the district’s reading proficiency standard. At the end of the year, Mrs. Boyd was happy with Derek’s development of his reading and writing abilities. Although Derek was not able to reach the district’s proficiency standard for writing, his writing growth was significant in relation to the beginning of the year. More importantly, he developed a better sense of himself as a writer (and reader), and made attempts at writing new words, and more elaborate and longer stories.

In short, Derek’s learning story was embedded within his experiences in the classroom and outside the classroom (e.g., his home and community, school, district and state). Literacy learning for Derek involved negotiating personal interests and goals, and his family and teacher’s expectations and goals - which were situated and constituted within a particular school, district and state. Becoming literate as defined by the district’s reading and writing proficiency standards was a major concern for his parents taking into account the state’s legislation of the fourth grade reading guarantee. Supporting Derek’s image of himself as a reader and writer, and reaching the district’s proficiency standards were major concerns to Mrs. Boyd. These concerns shaped Derek’s identity as a learner. At the same time, Derek built spaces at the classroom level (through his relationship with Mrs. Boyd, classmates and me) to share and build on his outside school experiences and multiple literacies (e.g., his knowledge about science, nature, Cub Scout, etc.). Derek’s relationship with Mrs. Boyd, especially her understanding of Derek as a learner, opened
up classroom spaces for curriculum co-construction through one-on-one and whole group interactions.

**Conclusion**

Children cannot possibly remain untouched by their contexts. Just as their contexts are shaped by their presence, children and their contexts mutually constitute each other.... A context is culturally and historically situated place and time, a specific here and now. It is the unifying link between the analytic categories of macrosociological and microsociological events: The context is the world as realized through interaction and the most immediate frame of reference for mutually engaged actors. (Graue & Walsh, 1998, pp. 8-9)

In this chapter, I used tracer units to reveal and understand the nature of different aspects of literacy teaching and learning in Julie Boyd’s first grade classroom. I selected four tracer units, representing major aspects of classroom literacy practices: (1) *assessment practices*; (2) a piece of the classroom’s *literacy curriculum* named “songs and poems;” (3) a planned *literacy event* over time called “shared reading;” and (4) the story of the literacy learning of *one student* named Derek. I examined each tracer unit over time and across contexts, over the course of one school year.

I used the concept of tracer unit as a focus, an analytical strategy, or “interpretive element” (Graue & Walsh, 1998). It allowed me taking a “situated perspective” (Green & Bloome, 1997; Green & Meyer, 1991; Kantor, Elgas & Fernie, 1993; Weade, 1992) to examine the flow of classroom life. Moreover, a tracer unit allowed me both to examine questions about the tracer unit itself (e.g., what is literacy learning for one student?), and to illuminate the local and the larger contexts that situate and constitute the tracer unit.
(e.g., how are the opportunities for Derek’s literacy learning shaped and co-constructed by his relationship with Mrs. Boyd, other classroom members and other contexts?). In chapter 4, contexts were taken apart and time was segmented into manageable chunks for methodological convenience and to display the multi-layered nature of literacy practices. This chapter conceptually reintegrates and reconstructs the layers of context in order to show their interdependence and co-constructed nature. By tracing important aspects of classroom literacy practices and locating them within the web of everyday life, I show the dynamic and intricate nature of literacy learning and teaching.

The findings presented in this chapter and chapter 4 show three consistent themes characterizing the nature of literacy teaching and learning: (1) the multi-layered nature of contexts in which literacy learning and teaching is embedded and situated; (2) the interdependence of layers of context; and (3) the negotiated, co-constructed and situated nature of classroom literacy learning and teaching. This study shows that we can not fully understand literacy teaching and learning in Julie Boyd’s classroom or any classroom without a close, over-time look at the outer and inner contexts in which literacy is embedded. As figure 5.4 illustrates, the classroom local contexts (the teacher, students, community and materials and space) are embedded within larger contexts (the school, the district and state, the family and community, the larger society, etc.) that interact with and shape each other.
Figure 5.4 Literacy Learning and Teaching as Situated and Co-Constructed within Multiple Layers of Context

1Classroom context adapted from Weade (1992)
Literacy learning and teaching in Mrs. Boyd's classroom was situated and co-constructed within interdependent layers of context. The local or classroom context where literacy practices took place was socially, culturally, politically, and historically situated. Thus, what became constituted as classroom context was "the world [the local and larger contexts] as realized through interaction and the most immediate frame of reference for mutually engaged actors" (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p.9). In other words, literacy for Julie Boyd, the classroom community or Derek involved interpreting and negotiating multiple frames of references and socially constructed meanings.

As the errors in figure 5.4 illustrate, teaching and learning involved a negotiation process in which multiple frames of references, goals and expectations shaped what became constituted as literacy for all classroom members, including families. For the teacher, Mrs. Boyd, implementing a literacy curriculum involved negotiation of expectations set by multiple layers of context: the district's competency-based education program (particularly the course of study and district-wide assessment guidelines and proficiency standards), the school's philosophy and history, the family and community background, the students' background, interests and perceived needs, and her own personal curriculum goals. Mrs. Boyd was directly responsible to students and families. For the classroom community, literacy became constituted over time through their evolving history as a learning community. Their process of becoming literate in first grade involved participation in literacy events with voice, accomplishing goals, progressing as readers and writers, and communicating. For Derek, literacy became constituted and framed by his relationships with his peers, teachers and family, and the
expectations set by Mrs. Boyd, his parents, the school and the district which were shaped by a larger national context. For example, the district’s reading proficiency standard for first grade had a deep impact on Derek’s image of himself as a reader.

At the same time, it is important to note that the nature of Mrs. Boyd’s decision-making and curriculum development was situated and co-constructed along different continuums. For example, she held power over local decisions such as the classroom’s daily schedule and the sequence and topics of thematic units. In these circumstances, the nature of curriculum co-construction was more teacher-controlled and thus falling into the teacher’s end of the continuum. On the other hand, the implementation and schedule of formal assessment practices such as the district’s standardized assessments were district-controlled despite Mrs. Boyd’s active role in its implementation. In classroom interactions, the development of an emergent curriculum such as the implementation of a “songs and poems” literacy curriculum, involved joint collaboration and participation in curriculum development that reflected students’ backgrounds, interests and response, and Mrs. Boyd’s ability to accommodate and negotiate multiple texts or contexts (for example, her ability to articulate the district’s course of study expectations through the classroom’s history as a singing community).

Thus, the nature of curriculum co-construction implies negotiation of multiple agendas and expectations or “situated tensions” (Green & Bloome, 1997). It reflects different continuums with “intermediate points” (Cochran-Smith, 1984), involving varied levels of participation of multiple participants in the decision-making process. Mrs. Boyd and her students constantly negotiated situated tensions and constraints (e.g., personal
frames of reference, community and family expectations, school and district requirements, etc.), which shaped and framed what became constituted and defined as literacy practices, and literacy learning and teaching. Every action and decision in the classroom reflected the participants’ negotiation of personal expectations and different agendas (many times contradictory agendas) that were embedded within a multi-layered and interdependent context.
The focus of this dissertation was to understand the nature of literacy learning and teaching across contexts and over time. Assuming literacy learning and teaching as socially and culturally situated processes (Chandler, 1992; Cochran-Smith, 1984; Collins & Green, 1992; Dyson, 1993; Heath, 1983; Solsken, 1993; Weade, 1992), I adopted an interpretive approach and ethnographic perspective to understand their situated nature. Thus, I took a close, over-time look at the nature of literacy in the life of a first grade classroom, and examined the nature of constructed classroom literacy practices from the perspectives of classroom members. This study involved a comprehensive look across contexts, situating literacy learning and teaching in the classroom context, and in layers of context outside the classroom (i.e., the district and state standards, the school, and the community and family). This over-time and comprehensive look revealed three consistent themes characterizing the nature of literacy teaching and learning: (1) the multi-layered nature of contexts in which literacy learning and teaching is embedded and situated; (2) the interdependence of layers of context; and (3) the negotiated, co-constructed and situated nature of classroom literacy learning and teaching.
In this discussion chapter, I situate my study within the research community where a sociocultural perspective on the nature of literacy learning and teaching is taken to re-affirm its premises and further build a picture of the complexity and richness of classroom life. I take as a starting point my initial question, *What is the nature of literacy learning and teaching in a particular first grade classroom?*, and go on to discuss this study’s contributions to current understanding on the nature of literacy curriculum, teaching and learning. In addition, I relate this understanding to the practical implications of this study, particularly by affirming the possibilities of teachers, who like Julie Boyd, can move artfully and effectively in their ability to take into account and negotiate the varied elements and issues that make up daily school and classroom life. Recommendations for further research are also addressed in this chapter.

**The Problem of the Study**

The nature of classroom life is dynamic, rich and complex; reexamination of static images of classroom practice is needed to better understand the nature and interplay of literacy learning and teaching processes. To understand the nature of classroom literacy learning and teaching, as well as to examine appropriate and effective instructional practices, it is important not only to take into account the nature of a particular curriculum and classroom context (i.e., the teacher, students, evolving classroom community, and space, time and materials available) but also the social, political, cultural and historical contexts in which they are embedded. In other words, it is important to take a “situated perspective” (Green & Bloome, 1997; Green & Meyer, 1991; Kantor, Elgas & Fernie, 283
1993); thus, examining literacy learning and teaching processes by locating them within “an ongoing stream of everyday life:”

... the social, linguistic, cultural, political, and economic backgrounds of participants contribute to the formation of a context for communicating. Although participants continue to define and elaborate this context as they interact, their participation is also “situated” within the larger series of contexts that they draw upon as resources to guide interaction and interpretation of meaning. In other words, the “moment” of face-to-face interaction is constructed out of multiple “moments” brought forth from other times and other places. (Weade, 1992, p.98)

Informed by studies that have examined the situated nature of literacy learning and/or teaching processes, this study takes a comprehensive and over time look at the nature of literacy learning and teaching in a particular first grade classroom. Taking into account the intricate and complex nature of classroom life and the process of curriculum enactment, this study further builds on a “situated perspective” on the nature of classroom life and literacy practices. It takes up the challenge previously taken by Cochran-Smith’s (1984) and Solsken’s (1993) ethnographic studies, which take a comprehensive look at multiple contexts in order to understand the interplay of local contexts and larger contexts as opportunities for literacy learning are constructed in the classroom. This study extends these studies by showing the impact that multiple layers of context have on classroom literacy practices over time, and by demonstrating how the co-constructed and situated nature of literacy teaching and learning influence teacher decision making, classroom literacy practices and curriculum, and student learning. It provides a closer and over time look at the nature of one teacher’s decision-making and actions, and process of curriculum co-construction.
The Situated Nature of Literacy, Teaching and Learning

I started this study with a broad question: What is the nature of literacy learning and teaching in a particular first grade classroom? Despite the rich body of literature in the area of literacy education, controversy continues over what is literacy learning, and how best to teach early reading and writing, and to assess children’s learning. My aim was to explore dynamic ways of seeing and understanding what is involved in what constitutes literacy learning and teaching over one school year. Informed by recent studies, which have revealed that literacy learning in the classroom is influenced by school, family and community ways of being literate and managing knowledge (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Heath, 1983; Moll, 1991; Solsken, 1993; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988), I chose to take a comprehensive look across contexts with a focus on the life of the classroom.

By building on the theoretical and methodological assumptions advocated by a sociocultural perspective, this study provides new insights and a dynamic picture of the ways in which literacy learning and teaching is socially constructed in one classroom. Further, it shows that there is not a short and straight answer to my original question. The literacy practices and opportunities for learning and teaching available in Julie Boyd’s classroom (or any classroom) were constituted, negotiated and co-constructed as a sociocultural and political process located within a multi-layered context. In this sense, this study further extends the notion of situated learning. Besides situating learning and teaching as social and cultural constructions of classroom members, this study argues that the nature of literacy learning and teaching is context(s)-bound, and needs to be examined
in light of the views, beliefs and expectations, educational philosophy, history and political positions of the teacher, students and their families, school, district and other social structures in the larger society (e.g., state policies, the National Standards-Based Reform Movement, etc.).

Thus, what becomes defined as literacy practices and literacy learning reflects multiple and complex definitions or perspectives of what counts as literacy, and literacy learning and teaching. As Green and Bloom (1997) explain,

Learning in classrooms is a problematic construct because, among other reasons, teachers and students, in situ, hold definitions of what counts as learning and what does not count as learning and may orient their behavior to those definitions. (p.192)

These definitions are constituted and co-constructed within "interactional spaces" (Heras, 1993) built in the classroom and in layers of context outside the classroom (e.g., the district and state standards, the school, and the community and family). By tracing the teacher’s decision making in relation to assessment practices, a classroom literacy practice, a piece of the literacy curriculum, and the learning story of one student, this study extends understanding on the socially constructed nature of teaching and learning. It shows how the situated and co-constructed nature of literacy teaching and learning unfolds in the flow of life of Julie Boyd’s classroom. In this way, this study grounds central premises advocated by a sociocultural perspective on the nature of learning, and literacy learning and teaching (see chapter 2). As I show in chapters 4 and 5, what became constituted as literacy learning and teaching in Mrs. Boyd’s classroom was “embedded
within a complex and dynamically evolving social context” (Weade, 1992, p.95), which was itself embedded in wider contexts of interaction (Erickson, 1982).

In addition, this study shows the interdependent and interrelated nature of literacy learning and teaching as co-constructed within a multi-layered context. By tracing major aspects of classroom practices (i.e., assessment practices, a piece of the literacy curriculum, a group literacy event and an individual learning story), I display and examine the interplay among contexts which framed what became constituted as literacy learning and teaching in Mrs. Boyd’s classroom. The four tracer units were useful analytical tools and interpretive elements that illuminated not only the nature of the tracers themselves but also the system or stream of classroom life in which they were embedded. They served as “snap shots” taken in the stream of classroom life that displayed (1) the multi-layered nature of contexts in which literacy learning and teaching is embedded; (2) the interdependence of layers of context; and (3) the negotiated, co-constructed and situated nature of classroom literacy learning and teaching.

My selection of these tracer units involved a principled decision, which aimed at examining classroom literacy practices and curriculum, and teaching and learning processes. The four tracer units illuminate how the situated, co-constructed and negotiated nature of literacy teaching and learning influence and shape teacher decision making, classroom literacy practices, and student learning. They reveal the complexities, dialogic nature and situated definitions of what became defined as literacy learning and teaching in Mrs. Boyd’s classroom. They illustrate the nature of classroom literacy practices, curriculum, teacher decision making and student learning over time, and reveal:

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the presence of different perspectives or definitions of what is literacy learning (and how to best assess it);

classroom practices (assessment, for example) are constituted by the negotiation of these definitions. Teaching decisions addressing individual students and the collective are shifting and multi-faceted, and they negotiate multiple perspectives and expectations;

literacy learning and teaching is a socially constructed process within a multi-layered context, and what becomes defined as literacy for the teacher and students is constituted by the negotiation of these contexts;

classroom practices reflect the negotiation of possibilities, contradictions, tensions and constraints;

opportunities for literacy learning and teaching are fostered by the construction of “intertextual” (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Lemke, 1995) links across contexts and texts; and

teachers like Julie Boyd can retain the power as a decision-maker, and foster possibilities of an emergent curriculum to take life across contexts and texts despite top-down pressures on meeting reading and writing proficiency standards and assessment requirements.

Following, I discuss the implications of each of the four tracer units examined in chapter 5 in light of my original questions. I further discuss what each tracer unit illuminates and informs on what is literacy learning and teaching, and what became constituted as a literacy curriculum in Mrs. Boyd’s first grade classroom.

Assessment Practices

The implementation of assessment practices was a major force in what constituted literacy in Julie Boyd’s classroom and how it became defined over the school year. As I describe in chapters 4 and 5, the teacher, school, district and state each presented specific expectations on assessment practices. The range of selected assessment practices reflected different, contradictory and/or overlapping perspectives and beliefs on the nature of literacy learning and teaching. These beliefs and perspectives supported different views of
“what is” literacy, and literacy learning and teaching. They reflected Mrs. Boyd’s curriculum goals, frames of reference, and theoretical and practical understanding of literacy learning and teaching; the school’s philosophy and history of using authentic assessment practices; and the district’s (and state’s) competency-based program and its assessment and proficiency requirements. As a tracer unit, assessment practices, or what became defined as assessment practices over the school year, illuminates the nature of classroom literacy practices as (a) involving different perspectives or definitions of what is literacy learning (and how to best assess it), (b) as constituted by the negotiation of these definitions, and (c) reflecting contradictions, tensions and constraints.

Taking a situated approach to assessment practices, this study shows that what became constituted as literacy assessment in Mrs. Boyd’s classroom was socially constructed within and across inner and outer contexts. Opportunities for literacy learning and teaching in Julie Boyd’s classroom were shaped by the negotiation of multiple contexts, texts or frames of reference representing multiple perspectives or definitions of what is literacy learning, and how to best assess it. For example, Mrs. Boyd’s theoretical knowledge of literacy learning was guided by her understanding of current research. As described in chapter 4, she advocates for a developmental, child-centered and literature-based approach to learning, which is in agreement with the school’s philosophy. Mrs. Boyd’s understanding of literacy learning was also expanded by her active role, in conjunction with other Highwood teachers and university faculty, in the development of a reading and writing developmental continuum. This developmental continuum describes five stages of reading and writing development: emerging (grades kindergarten/1),
beginning (grades 1/2), developing (grades 2/3), advancing (4/5), and consolidating (grades 5/6 and up). Mrs. Boyd's used it to guide her informal observations, expectations of students' progress and teaching actions. Moreover, Mrs. Boyd's teaching experience at Highwood elementary and personal experiences (e.g., as a mother of three children) also were frames of reference used in her understanding of literacy learning and teaching. In other words, Mrs. Boyd's understanding of what is literacy, and literacy learning and teaching, and how to best assess students' learning involved multiple definitions grounded in her theoretical and practical knowledge, curriculum goals and frames of references.

Mrs. Boyd's selection of assessment tools included practices that reflected the school and her curriculum goals and educational philosophy (e.g., use of portfolios, conferences), as well as the tests required by the district's (and state's) competency-based education program. In this sense, the range of assessment practices implemented in the classroom reflected the negotiation of different perspectives and expectations. This negotiation of expectations shaped and/or constrained the selection of assessment practices as well as the development of a literacy curriculum. For example, in order to meet assessment requirements and proficiency standards set by the district's (and state's) competency-based education program, Mrs. Boyd had to make sure that her curriculum and teaching actions covered the content expected to be evaluated by the progress report cards and end of the year assessments. On one hand, Mrs. Boyd's assessment practices were in agreement with the districts' selected practices (e.g., the Observation Survey; Clay, 1993b) and were used to inform her teaching. On the other hand, to prepare students
for assessment requirements, Mrs. Boyd accommodated literacy activities (for example, the writing rubric practices, and writing vocabulary practices) in her monthly schedule that prepared students to respond within specific guidelines and interactional norms (e.g., sitting silently on assigned seats, and working alone), which contrasted with a view of reading and writing for authentic purposes. Mrs. Boyd had to constantly negotiate her developmental view of reading development with the district’s demands that all students be reading at least at level 14 by the end of the school year.

Thus, the implementation of assessment practices involved contradictions and tensions, and constrained as well as supported opportunities for literacy teaching and learning. On one hand, Mrs. Boyd perceived assessment practices as important tools for gathering information about the students’ progress, guiding teaching decisions, and informing families, the school and the district of students’ growth, level of proficiency, and need for intervention services. For example, although Mrs. Boyd had concerns about the district’s reading and writing proficiency standards for first grade level, she perceived district-wide standards as beneficial for teachers’ communication within the district.

It is helpful in a lot of ways because we struggled for years to find an even ground, a standard for each grade. We tried to do it within ourselves for a long time, and now it’s district-wide. It makes a lot of sense because if you say that a child is at level four, than everybody now has a good sense of what you mean instead of talking about specific books. (AT, August 1998)

On the other hand, Mrs. Boyd’s teaching actions accommodated a range of assessment practices and demands that shaped her process of curriculum implementation, organization of daily schedule, and communication with families. Mrs. Boyd had to meet
assessment deadlines, which created dilemmas and additional pressures. Specifically, the
district’s (and state’s) required assessment practices and its schedule placed constraints
and shaped the organization and focus of classroom time; the regularity and type of
planned literacy events promoted in the classroom; the length of thematic units; and the
type of school-home interactions. As previously discussed in chapter 5, opportunities for
literacy learning and teaching were shaped and constrained in order to accommodate to
the assessment schedule and expectations set by proficiency standards. Additionally, the
district’s assessment requirements and new standards, and the school’s history of
implementing authentic forms of assessment, influenced and shaped the nature of
classroom opportunities for literacy learning and teaching as well as Mrs. Boyd’s contact
with families and overall school climate.

The tensions involved in meeting the district’s reading and writing proficiency
standards were complex and can not be discussed as a “black or white” issue. That is,
proficiency standards supported teaching decisions and courses of action, which
promoted the students’ ability to read harder books and write within the district’s
proficiency requirements. At the same time, they limited classroom time (as illustrated in
figure 5.1, p.224) and the implementation of planned literacy events (e.g., reading
groups), and the length of thematic units. They did not support students’ writing of
elaborate stories lacking correct punctuation and use of upper and lower case letters, and
focused on successful reading as the ability to read at level 14. As a result, considering
the district’s assessment requirements and proficiency standards, literacy learning
becomes defined as the students’ ability to read at level 14 and write within pre-defined
criteria (which prioritizes form over content). To achieve these goals represents success (as a teacher and learner); however, if one has a different image of literacy learning the meaning of success is questioned. In fact, what became defined as successful learning also involved the negotiation of expectations set by different contexts and social structures. That is, supporting students’ to be successful in their school life, and making space for broader images of what is a first grader reader and writer. Mrs. Boyd’s ability to implement the district’s competency-based education program, as well as find spaces to promote an emergent curriculum (e.g., the use of songs and poems) and build intertextual ties building the students’ prior experiences and classroom experiences speak to this broader image. Moreover, Mrs. Boyd’s negotiation of multiple contexts and texts show that despite tensions, demands and contradictory expectations, teachers can take an active and empowered position as decision makers.

**Literacy Curriculum: The Use of Song and Poems**

A second tracer unit, a piece of the literacy curriculum, further illustrates Mrs. Boyd’s negotiation of multiple contexts and texts. Mrs. Boyd promoted the development of an emergent curriculum by finding spaces to build on the students’ voices as well as her personal curriculum goals. In chapter 5, I trace the chronology of the classroom history as a “singing bunch” from the beginning until the end of the school year, which was shaped and fostered by an emergent curriculum co-constructed in the classroom context, and by contexts outside the classroom (i.e., the school, district and family contexts). This tracer unit illuminates (a) the socially constructed nature of literacy
learning and teaching within a multi-layered context, and (b) the powerful role of the teacher in fostering possibilities of an emergent curriculum to take life across contexts and texts despite top-down pressures on meeting reading and writing proficiency standards and assessment requirements.

Mrs. Boyd's implementation of a literacy curriculum involved a situated and contextualized social, political and cultural process. Mrs. Boyd's decision-making took into account her theoretical and practical understandings of literacy learning and teaching (e.g., a child-centered and literature-based approach to literacy learning); a high number of students who did not see themselves as readers and writers; the school's philosophy and history (e.g., mission of promoting a learning community); the district's course of study, assessment requirements and new reading proficiency standards for first grade; and the state's legislation on proficiency testing and a fourth grade reading guarantee. In the process of curriculum development, Mrs. Boyd took a central role in orchestrating multiple expectations and perspectives within a multi-layered context. The students were not passive in this process, and themselves (as Derek's story illustrates) had to negotiate multiple expectations and perspectives. The students' prior backgrounds, abilities and interests were important resources to the process of curriculum development within Mrs. Boyd's child-centered approach to learning and teaching. Mrs. Boyd's use of a variety of songs and poems in the classroom illustrate how the students' response and interest affected her curriculum decisions and actions.

Mrs. Boyd and her students' joint construction of a songs and poems curriculum also illustrates the powerful role of the teacher in fostering possibilities of an emergent
curriculum to take life across contexts and texts despite top-down pressures on
assessment and proficiency standards. This piece of Mrs. Boyd's literacy curriculum
reminds one of possibilities, and teachers’ active role in influencing and negotiating
constraints and tensions resulted from the current influence of state policies on testing
student achievement and proficiency on districts, schools, classrooms and communities.
Instead of curriculum and instruction being solely guided by tests “dictating what is
taught” (Brooks, 1991 in Kessler, 1992, p.36), Mrs. Boyd’s teaching shows that multiple
contexts and texts can be negotiated. By implementing a songs and poems curriculum,
Mrs. Boyd empowered the students’ interests, the school’s child-centered and
developmental approach to learning, and mission to develop a community of learners, as
well as her theoretical and practical understandings of the nature of literacy learning and
teaching. At the same time, Mrs. Boyd accommodated the objectives of the district’s
language arts course of study and supported teaching and learning opportunities, which
aimed at meeting the district’s new proficiency standards and focus on reading
proficiency.

A Group Literacy Event

By tracing a group event over time, I also demonstrate how Julie Boyd negotiated
multiple texts and contexts as she carried on whole group instruction. In chapter 5, I take
a close look at a planned literacy event called “shared reading.” This close look at a
central literacy event and classroom practice provides specific insights into the nature of
literacy, and literacy learning and teaching processes; that is: (a) opportunities for literacy
learning and teaching are fostered by the construction of “intertextual” (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Lemke, 1995) links across contexts and texts, and (b) the teacher’s shifting and multi-faceted interactions with the group which aim at supporting group and individual learning.

Mrs. Boyd’s effective use of language was an important tool in supporting opportunities for literacy teaching and learning, particularly by building intertextual links between interactional spaces built in the classroom and contexts outside the classroom (i.e., the school, district and state, and family and community contexts). Thus, as I show in chapter 5, shared reading events illustrate Mrs. Boyd and her students’ co-construction of various types of “intertextual” (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Lemke, 1995) ties between the text being read and discussed, and: classroom members’ frames of reference (e.g., prior knowledge and experiences); their school and classroom experiences; Mrs. Boyd’s practical knowledge and curriculum goals; school activities; the district’s course of study and proficiency standards; and the family and community context.

Intertextual links among texts, events or contexts provided a background to understand the text being read, bridge new content, and reinforce previous content taught. Mrs. Boyd’s orchestrated these links through her effective use of language as a mediator for teaching and learning. At the same time, Mrs. Boyd’s interactions with the group were multi-faceted and changed over the school year. Her instructional decisions and actions at the group level always took into account the students’ individual backgrounds, interests, abilities and needs. As the examples in chapter 5 illustrate, opportunities for literacy teaching and learning were fostered by Mrs. Boyd’s and the students’ exploration of
interertextual links between prior experiences and new knowledge being constructed. For example, by building upon individual students’ answers to questions asked during book introduction, Boyd confirmed and expanded their prior knowledge (e.g., Nathan in episode 5.6, p.256), and fostered new learning opportunities for other students.

Thus, Mrs. Boyd’s ultimate goal when interacting at the group or individual level was to promote each student’s learning and development as a reader and writer. In this process, she accommodated and used as frames of reference the district’s course of study (in all the content areas) and proficiency requirements; the school’s philosophy, history and schedule; the community and family backgrounds and expectations; her curriculum goals, frames of reference, and theoretical and experiential knowledge; and available resources in the classroom, school and community. Despite constraints, guidelines and schedule requirements, Mrs. Boyd retained the power to make decisions and choose appropriate courses of action during shared reading events.

Derek’s Literacy Learning Story

By tracing Derek’s classroom life and experiences outside school, I show how one student negotiated his learning across contexts and over time. Similarly, Julie Boyd’s individualized instructional decisions were situated and embedded within multiple layers of context. By tracing the life of one student, this study shows that it is necessary to take an over time look across contexts to understand what becomes constituted as one story of literacy learning. As a tracer unit, Derek’s learning story show (a) literacy learning as a negotiated process across multiple layers of context, (b) teaching decisions addressing an
individual child as negotiating multiple perspectives and expectations, and (c) what becomes defined as literacy as constituted by the negotiation of contexts, perspectives and expectations.

Derek’s literacy learning experiences as a first grader were influenced and shaped by his prior knowledge, personal goals and interests; his parents’ involvement in school and classroom activities; his relationship with Mrs. Boyd; his participation at the school’s Early Reading Initiative (ERI) program; his involvement in Cub Scout; and other important events in his life. Like Mrs. Boyd’s decisions and actions, Derek too negotiated multiple layers of context located within the interactional spaces built at the classroom level, and outside the classroom (e.g., his family and community, the school, and the district’s proficiency expectations). His identity as a learner, and reader and writer in the classroom was constituted and co-constructed by the interdependence among multiple contexts. In similar ways, Derek’s parents image of what constituted literacy learning was also situated and co-constructed within multiple layers of context. Further, Mrs. Boyd’s interactions and teaching decisions addressing Derek’s learning took into account multiple layers of context: his prior background and interests; his family expectations; her curriculum goals, theoretical and experiential background, and frames of reference; the school’s philosophy, history and available resources (e.g., intervention services); and the district’s (and state’s) course of study, proficiency and assessment requirements.
Towards a Multi-faceted and Dialogic View of Literacy Learning and Teaching

By tracing assessment practices, shared reading events, the classroom’s history as a singing bunch, and Derek’s learning story, I display the dialogic and multi-faceted nature of literacy teaching and learning. In essence, to understand the nature of literacy learning and teaching in Julie Boyd’s classroom, or any classroom, it is necessary to examine it as situated and constituted across contexts and over time. Like in Mrs. Boyd’s classroom, opportunities for literacy learning and teaching are embedded within intermingling contexts. For example, at the classroom level in Mrs. Boyd’s classroom, literacy was embedded in interactional spaces constituting a range of daily routines and activities. On the other hand, Derek’s literacy learning story and Mrs. Boyd’s decisions and courses of action show that classroom interactional spaces were themselves intermingled with contexts outside the classroom (e.g., the school, family and community, district, state, etc.).

In the flow of classroom life, literacy teaching and learning processes involved “a process of transforming participation” (Rogoff, 1994, p.210). Further, literacy teaching and learning involved active decision making and negotiation of possibilities, expectations and images of a reader and writer, and constraints and tensions. Mrs. Boyd’s artful negotiation of contexts and “situated tensions” (Green & Bloome, 1997) was critical for the development of an emergent curriculum and opening spaces for her personal curriculum goals. Like Mrs. Boyd, students, parents and administrators also had to negotiate contexts and texts in order to take part and succeed in classroom and school life.
Artful Teaching: Negotiating Multiple Contexts

This study illuminates the central role of the teacher, Julie Boyd, in orchestrating smoothly the flow of classroom life and how she makes constant connections to conflicting expectations set by state standards and legislation, district guidelines and proficiency standards, the school philosophy and history, her own philosophy and curriculum goals, and her students and their families' backgrounds, expectations and goals. Mrs. Boyd's process of curriculum development involved a dynamic and intricate process of decision making, which took into account multiple agendas and expectations at different levels.

The nature of Mrs. Boyd's process of curriculum development involved shifting and multifaceted interactions with her students, and the co-construction of various types of "intertextual" (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Lemke, 1995) ties between the texts being used and created in the classroom, and: classroom members' frames of reference (e.g., prior knowledge and experiences); their school and classroom experiences; Mrs. Boyd's practical knowledge and curriculum goals; school activities; the district's course of study and proficiency standards; and the family and community context. Despite the constraints placed by an intensive assessment schedule and static definitions of reading and writing proficiency standards, Mrs. Boyd actively created and fostered these intertextual links, which promoted opportunities for literacy teaching and learning that reflected her personal philosophy, students' interests and background, and the classroom's evolving history as a community. As I discuss in the implication section below, Mrs. Boyd's example re-affirms possibilities of the teacher's role in the classroom.
in moving artfully in her/his ability to take into account all the elements that make up
daily school and classroom life.

As discussed in chapter 5, the nature of Mrs. Boyd’s decision making and
curriculum development was situated and co-constructed along different continuums. It
involved negotiation of multiple agendas and expectations or “situated tensions” (Green
& Bloome, 1997), and reflected different continuums with “intermediate points”
(Cochran-Smith, 1984), involving varied levels of participation of multiple participants in
the decision making process. In other words, Mrs. Boyd had power over local classroom
decisions (for example, the sequence and topics of thematic units) and, in these
circumstances, the nature of curriculum co-construction was more teacher-controlled and
falling into the teacher’s end of the continuum. On the other hand, the district’s
competency-based education program defined district-controlled teaching actions.
Moreover, the development of an emergent curriculum, such as the implementation of a
“songs and poems” literacy curriculum, reflected joint collaboration and participation of
Mrs. Boyd and her students in the process of curriculum development, which falls within
intermediate points along the continuum.

An important element in Mrs. Boyd’s artful negotiation of multiple contexts and
texts was the images of curriculum and learner (reader and writer) that guided her
instructional decisions and courses of action over the school year. Instead of promoting a
“testing culture” or teaching only for the test (or proficiency standards), she was able to
accommodate situated tensions and contradictory expectations, and bridge across multiple
contexts (i.e., the students’ background, the family and community, the school, the
district and state). As Newman (1998) argues, “our inquiry into literacy learning goes far beyond reading and writing to a need to articulate beliefs about teaching and learning” (Newman, 1998, p.xv). Mrs. Boyd’s multi-faceted decision-making went beyond reading and writing and a particular Language Arts course of study, and opened up spaces to multiple voices to take an active part in the curriculum process. In this sense, she was able to articulate and see through different perspectives and beliefs, and consequently take an empowering position within a social and political context that stresses accountability and standardization.

**Implications of the Study**

This study has important implications for educators and researchers. First, it provides a theoretical and methodological framework to examine the dynamic and intricate nature of literacy learning and teaching in classrooms. Second, it illuminates the central role and power of teachers as decision makers in the process of curriculum development.

**Theoretical and Methodological Implications**

This study shows that we can not fully understand literacy learning and teaching in Julie Boyd’s classroom or any classroom without a close, over-time look at the local and larger contexts in which literacy is embedded. Taking a “situated perspective” on the nature of literacy learning and teaching implies examining literacy practices as located within the flow of classroom life. This study extends the notion of a situated approach to
classroom literacy practices; in other words, it demonstrates how the immediate
classroom environment "is embedded in [and interdependent to] wider environments of
interaction" (Erickson, 1982, p.151). Thus, it implies that to understand the nature of
classroom literacy practices, we need to take into account the presence of inner and outer
layers of context, and how they frame what becomes constituted as literacy (and learning
and teaching). By being critical and reflective about these layers, teachers find spaces to
negotiate their personal philosophy and curriculum goals, and the expectations and
pressures of outer layers of context.

This study has important implications for theory and research in early literacy,
learning and teaching. Building upon prior research in early literacy (e.g., Cochran-Smith,
1984; Solsken, 1993), this study illuminates the multi-layered and interdependent nature
of contexts. Like Cochran-Smith's ethnographic study of storyreading, this study shows
the interplay of multiple layers of context in the development of classroom literacy
practices. On the other hand, this study extends on Cochran-Smith's research by showing
the impact and interdependence of multiple layers of context on teacher decision making,
student learning and the development of an emergent curriculum. This study supports
Solsken's study of literacy learning by illustrating the influence of family experiences and
expectations on a child's image of himself as a reader and writer. Finally, this study
displays the situated nature of literacy learning and teaching as embedded and located in
the classroom context (Collins & Green, 1992; Green & Meyer, 1991; Kantor, Elgas &
Fernie, 1993; Weade, 1992), as well as in contexts outside the classroom. In other words,
interactional spaces built at the classroom level and contexts outside the classroom are all used as frames in what becomes constituted as literacy learning and teaching over time.

In sum, this study argues for more comprehensive, “holistic” (Floriani, 1997; Zaharlick & Green, 1991) and “dialogic” (Dyson, 1995) descriptions and understandings of literacy learning and teaching processes. In other words,

By looking at the relationships that are possible and constructed between members (i.e., people) and between members and texts, contexts, and content, we begin to construct a more holistic, situated view of what counts as being a student, learner, teacher, as well as knowledge in that particular class. We can thus come to understand teaching and learning as dialectical social processes. (Floriani, 1997, p.353).

Furthermore, by using theoretical and methodological lenses that reveals the complexities and situated definitions and tensions of what becomes defined as literacy learning and teaching in classrooms.

**Implications for Teaching**

This study focuses on one particular classroom situated in a particular social, cultural, political and historical context. Nevertheless, the description and analysis of the complexity of the nature of life in this classroom can contribute to the understanding of other classrooms. Thus, the findings presented in this study can be of use to other teachers by providing insight into the nature of literacy learning and teaching in “a new but similar setting” (Rossmann & Rallis, 1998, p.47). In other words, rather than a prescription of what literacy teaching and learning ought to be, this study aims to provide a comprehensive picture of the nature of literacy learning and teaching in one first grade
classroom, which can be used by teachers and other educators to reflect on their particular contexts and practices.

This study supports a “situated approach” to teaching; that is, a dynamic and multifaceted view of curriculum development. In this view, the nature of curriculum development involves a negotiated process of teacher decision-making in which courses of action are situated and co-constructed within multiple layers of context. In this sense, curriculum development is not an isolated process within the constraints of the local classroom. Instead, it is situated and constituted within a multi-layered context involving: (a) the teacher’s curriculum goals, theoretical and experiential knowledge, and frames of reference; (b) the students’, their families’ and their communities’ background, experiences and expectations; (c) an evolving classroom community with its own history and frames of reference; (d) the school’s philosophy and history; (e) the district’s and state’s course of study, proficiency standards, assessment practices and intervention services; and (f) the larger society (e.g., the National Standards-Based Reform Movement, national and state legislation, etc.).

This study also illuminates the central role of teachers in negotiating situated tensions and multiple expectations set by different layers of context. Teachers’ expertise and thorough knowledge of literacy learning and teaching can support the negotiation of multiple agendas and expectations set at different levels of context. Designing appropriate and supportive curriculum, instruction, and assessment requires an understanding of the complex ways in which literacy and assessment practices become constituted and defined within the life of a classroom, and contexts outside the classroom. In order to make
effective instructional decisions that can allow for multiple opportunities for learning and teaching, it is important to articulate situated tensions and build intertextual links between expectations set by the content of courses of study, proficiency standards, and classroom experiences. Recent research on literacy learning and teaching have provided examples of effective learning environments: classroom environments in which children had the opportunity to engage in activities that "allowed for diverse means of participation" (Dyson, 1997, p.93), and learning environments in which culturally relevant teaching practices supported a cultural bridge between children's experiences at home and at school (e.g., Heath, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Moll et al., 1992). Like in Julie Boyd's classroom, in these cases, teachers artfully negotiated tensions and constraints without compromising and losing sight of their personal curriculum goals and theoretical and practical understanding of children's learning, teaching and/or literacy.

Recommendations for Further Study

A major goal in this study was to develop dynamic ways of seeing and understanding what is involved in what constitutes literacy learning and teaching over one school year. Taking a sociocultural perspective to other classroom settings may illuminate other dimensions of the socially constructed nature of literacy teaching and learning, as well as provide insights on how the findings presented in this study may look in a different classroom. For example, considering the social, cultural, political and historical nature of classroom life (and literacy learning and teaching), a different classroom may reflect a different sociocultural history and political climate. Thus, the nature of teacher
decision making, student learning, and classroom literacy practices and curriculum may look differently. Additionally, this study looked at one classroom and one experienced teacher during a successful school year. Taking a sociocultural frame to investigate the nature of changes from year to year and curriculum development for younger teachers may be of value in order to develop and show more comprehensive, holistic and dynamic theoretical models to younger teachers. On the other hand, taking a sociocultural frame to examine current state-level policies and how they are negotiated and co-constructed in districts, schools and classrooms can provide critical insights on the interplay between new policies and legislation and the nature of literacy learning and teaching at different grade levels. It is also important to continue to take a sociocultural frame to examine how the nature of families’ interactions and relationships with teachers and schools is influenced by the interplay of multiple layers of context.

This study also provides insights on the nature of teacher decision making as located within a multi-layered context. More studies on teacher as decision makers are needed. This study looked at one experienced teacher, other studies could look at younger teachers’ decision making from a situated perspective. New studies can also provide insights on teachers’ ability to be reflective about their practices and take empowered positions despite the constraints and tensions involved in the current educational climate. Taking a sociocultural perspective can illuminate the richness and dialogic nature of classroom life in different settings, and the complexity and craft of teacher decision making.
APPENDIX A

Transcription Conventions
Transcription Conventions

(adapted from Rowe, 1994)

**Direct transcription:** When speech was transcribed verbatim from audiotapes (AT) or field notes (FN), the speaker's name introduces the speech (e.g., Ray, MB (Mrs. Boyd), etc.). S (student) and Ss (more than one student talk at the same time) were used when I was not able to identify the speaker.

**Emphasis:** Where a word or syllable is spoken with extra emphasis, it is underlined (e.g., Nathan *Like rose*).

**Simultaneous speech:** Where two or more people speak at once, the overlapping portion of their utterances are enclosed with slash marks (e.g., Ss /The duck and the fox/).

**Incompleteness:** Where an utterance is interrupted or otherwise left incomplete, this is indicated by "—" (e.g., MB What can you tell me by looking at the pic —).

**Pausing:** When there are noticeable pauses either within or between utterances, this is indicated by a series of dotes (e.g., ...).

**Inaudible speech:** Where words or phrases are completely inaudible, this is indicated by a series of asterisks enclosed in parentheses (e.g., (***)). The number of asterisks is an estimate of the number of words which were spoken.

**Tentative transcription:** When the exact transcription of speech is difficult, this is indicated by enclosing a probable transcription in parentheses (e.g., MB That's my (family, and two dogs.)).

**Omitted conversation or words:** When transcripts have been shortened, this is indicated by a series of carets (e.g., (^^^)).

**Explanatory comments:** When explanatory comments are added to a direct transcription, they are enclosed in brackets (e.g., MB And a good thing about [poems and charts], with these, they're short; or MB This is called [MB interrupts reading]). When a name is changed, their pseudonym is enclosed in brackets (e.g., MB You have a picture of [Highwood]; or MB Mrs. [Boyd] has to get the tune on her head.) except for the students' names.
APPENDIX B

Consent Form and Letter to Families
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN
SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

I consent to participating in (or my child’s participation in) research entitled:

An Ethnographic Study of Literacy Learning and Teaching

Dr. Becky Kirschner or Maria Luiza Dantas has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my (my child’s) participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Furthermore, I understand that I am (my child is) free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me (my child).

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

Date: ___________________________ Signed: ___________________________

(Participant)

Signed:

(Principal Investigator or his/her authorized representative)

Signed: ___________________________ Signed: ___________________________

(Person authorized to consent for participant – if required)

Witness: ___________________________
Dear Parents or Guardians,

My name is "Malu" (Maria Luiza) Dantas. I am a doctoral student working with Dr. Becky Kirschner at The Ohio State University. I am studying the process of learning and teaching reading and writing in the early grades. Beginning this fall until the end of the school year, I will be documenting reading and writing activities developed by your child’s teacher, Ms. [Julie Boyd]. The purpose of my study is to try to understand the ways through which children learn and develop as readers and writers in the classroom. During the duration of the study, I will participate in the classroom as an observer and aid. I will assist Ms. [Boyd] during classroom activities when needed.

I would like to request your permission to video and audio tape your child’s participation in classroom literacy activities; to take photographs of particular classroom projects; and to have access to your child’s written work and make photocopies of it. I would also like permission to contact you for the purpose of gathering more information about your child’s experiences with reading and writing outside the school. The videotapes, audiotapes, photographs and copies of written work will be used for research purposes only and will not be shared in any way with the school for evaluation purposes. The videotapes, audiotapes and photographs will be kept in my possession for five years and then be destroyed. Your child’s name or the teacher’s name will never be used on any information that I present in professional conferences, journals or courses. Your child will not be asked to do anything differently or to take part in any activities outside the usual classroom routines. The purpose of this study is to observe the normal routines and activities developed in the classroom, and the teacher and children’s participation in reading and writing activities. I will participate in informal conversations with your child and other students about their written work and reading activities only for the purpose of understanding their process of engaging in reading and writing activities, and to assist them when asked for help.

If you have any question, please contact me at... my supervisor Dr. Becky Kirschner at... or Ms. [Julie Boyd]. If you agree to your child’s participation, please sign and return the attached consent form to Ms. [Julie Boyd]. I will send you a photocopy.

Sincerely,

Maria Luiza Dantas
Doctoral Candidate

Dr. Becky Kirschner
co-Adviser/Principal Investigator
APPENDIX C

First Homevisit: Letter to Families
First Homevisit: Letter to Families

October 26, 1998

To the family of __________________________

We would like to request your permission to visit you and your child at home. The purpose of our visit is to better understand and document your child's experiences outside the school that support and inform his/her learning in the classroom. We would also like to talk about your child's experiences with reading and writing outside the school.

As mentioned in the consent form you signed in the beginning of the school year, the purpose of Malu's study is to observe and document children's exploration of and engagement in reading and writing activities in the classroom. The goal is to better understand the ways through which children learn and develop as readers and writers in the classroom. Since children bring to the classroom a variety of important experiences that support and inform their learning, we would like to visit a small number of children at their home in order to learn about their experiences outside the classroom. Malu has been focusing her classroom observations primarily on a small number of children in order to make the data collection process more manageable.

It was very helpful to receive your feedback on your child's strengths in the survey that Mrs. [Boyd] sent home in the first week of school. If you're interested in sharing with us more about your child, please check at the bottom of the page possible times and dates that would work for you.

We appreciate your interest and participation.

Malu and Mrs. [Boyd]

* Please mark the days and times that work best for you:

___ Monday after school  (Time(s): __________________________)
___ Wednesday after school (Time(s): __________________________)
___ other: __________________________
APPENDIX D

Guiding Questions used in the Second Informal Interview with the Families
Guiding Questions used in the Second Informal Interview with the Families

May/June 1999

- What do you think your child learned about reading and writing this year (at school and outside school)? How do you feel about his/her learning?

- Did you have any concerns in the beginning of the school year? Or later in the year?

- How did the school program (and philosophy) support your child’s literacy learning?

- How did Mrs. Boyd’s literacy curriculum support your child’s literacy learning? What things did your child like about school?

- How do you feel about doing homework with your child at home? Do you think is worthwhile to do it?

- If you were in an ideal world, what would you change in the way the school is organized and how reading and writing is taught? What kind of literacy experiences and background would you like your child to have at school?

- What do you know about the new proficiency standards (for reading)? What do you think about it? What do you know about the fourth grade reading guarantee? How do you feel about it? Did they influence the way you work(ed) with your child?

- What are your goals and expectations for your child for next year? Are you considering keeping your child at Highwood elementary?

- What are your plans for this summer? What things do you want your child to be involved with?

- Do you have any questions about my study?
APPENDIX E

An Example of the “Ask Me About” Weekly Letter
Ask Me About...

... working on our self-portraits. One day we painted our skin, the next the hair using our hand-prints, and then we added cloth, buttons, and other materials for eyes, clothes, etc. Our pictures are on display.

... finishing our Rainbow of Color books. We have worked very hard on them.

... practicing walking in quiet lines and using quiet voices. We have also drawn pictures to help us remember our class expectations. We will continue to practice these skills all year.

... writing a story about animals. (This is part of the assessments also.) We drew a picture first. We will also write another story next week.

... being the first class to have popsicles for returning all our forms. We enjoyed them as well as extra recess. Thanks for returning them!

... the songs we are learning that are helping us learn to spell red and blue. We also like the pizza song. See if I can sing them to you at home.

** Thanks also for returning the forms for Hala — we appreciate your promptness.

*** Parent Night is next Thurs, Sept. 17, 6:00-7:00.

*** School fees are payable at any time. Please check in the office for forms which may allow the fee to be waived.
APPENDIX F

An Example of the Monthly Homework Calendar
An Example of the Monthly Homework Calendar

October 1, 1998

Dear Families,

The month of October will find us completing our unit on insects as our caterpillars change into butterflies. The children have really seemed to enjoy this unit and have learned a lot about bugs.

In October, we will be focusing on the mathematical concepts of shapes: solid shapes, and patterns. During the week of October 11th, you can help us begin our study by sending in any of the following items: shoe boxes, cereal boxes, empty rolls from paper towels, toilet paper, or gift wrap, or any item which is in the shape of a pyramid, cone, cube, or cylinder. We will be painting these items to make a "shape" display. Boxes of crackers also lend themselves to this unit as many come in different shapes (Ritz - circles or ovals, Triscuits - squares, graham crackers - rectangles). If you could send a box of crackers, it would be greatly appreciated. We will use them for a graphing activity. Marshmallows (large) and toothpicks also allow us to build 3 dimensional objects.

The homework calendar is on the reverse side of this letter. These are suggestions which reinforce the concepts we are working on in the classroom. The book bags will continue to be sent home on Monday or Tuesday each week. Please take a few minutes each evening to read this book with your child. They should be returned on Thursday along with the library books.

Other activities you can do with your child on a continual basis are counting (and writing the numbers) to 100, counting by two's, five's and ten's to 100, asking what number comes before or after a number, writing the alphabet in upper and lower case, and playing "I spy something which starts with (any letter of the alphabet)."

As you may remember from last year, we do not have a Halloween party at school but have a harvest celebration in November.

Thanks for your support.

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Thursday, 10-1 - Ask me about the bee lady that spoke today.

Friday, 10-2 - Look for butterflies this weekend. Where did you see them? What were they doing? What colors were they?

Monday, 10-5 - How many days are there in October? Make a collection of that many items (pennies, cereal, etc.) Put them into piles of 10. How many piles do you have? Are there any left over?

Wednesday, 10-7 - Look for signs of fall. Divide a sheet of paper into squares. Draw a picture of four different signs of fall. Bring it to class to share on Thursday. Return the book bag tomorrow.

Friday, 10-9 - Make a list of the names of every person in your family. Whose name has the most letters? Whose name has the least? Cut the names apart and put them in order from least to most.

Remember to collect items to bring to school that are cylinders, cubes, cones, or pyramids. If possible, also send in one of the food items - large marshmallows, crackers in different shapes.

Monday, 10-12 - Why is this day important to us? Can you remember how many ships? What were their names?

Wednesday, 10-14 - Cut shapes out of colored paper. Make circles, rectangles, and triangles. Can you put the shapes together to make a picture? Bring the picture to school tomorrow to share. Put your book bag in your backpack.

Friday, 10-16 - Look for different shapes around your house. What shape are doors? Windows? Can you find any triangles? Squares? Circles?

Monday, 10-19 - Make a pattern using pennies, nickels and dimes. Count how much money you used.

Wednesday, 10-21 - Autumn is another word for fall. What happens to trees in autumn? Make a collection of autumn leaves. Tape them by their stems to a sheet of paper. Bring it to school to share tomorrow. Don't forget your book bag.

Friday, 10-23 - Orange and black are Halloween colors. How many orange or black things can you name? Can you find anything orange or black in your house? (If you don't participate in Halloween activities, please ignore this activity as well as any that follows.)

Monday, 10-26 - Draw a circle. Turn it into a spider. Recite Eensy Weensy Spider.

Wednesday, 10-28 and Thursday, 10-29 - If you go trick-or-treating, count your candy. How much did you have? How many different ways can you sort it? Bring one piece of candy to school on Friday for a graphing activity.

Friday, October 30 - Go for a walk this weekend. What sounds do you hear when you walk through leaves? Help someone rake their leaves. What month begins on Sunday?
APPENDIX G

The Snowball Express (or Literacy Night) Flyer
YOU AND YOUR CHILD ARE INVITED TO:
THE SNOWBALL EXPRESS

Hands-on sessions to promote reading and writing in your home.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 26, 1999
6:30pm - 8:00pm

*ear something with a snowman!
*School age children receive a free book and a surprise gift!
*Enter the drawing for a door prize!
*Enjoy refreshments!
*Enjoy an exciting art activity!
*Bring your younger brothers and sisters (older children are asked not to attend).
*Babysitting provided for children 4 years and under.

Please return this slip by Thursday, January 14th.

(Parent) ___________________________ will be bringing the following children:

I will need babysitting services for ____________ of them.
APPENDIX H

Parent Survey Questions
Parent Survey Questions

Please help me to get to know your child. As your child’s teacher, I would like the school year to be the best he/she has had. That is why I am asking for your help. I found the more I know about my students, the easier it is to meet their needs. For that reason, I would appreciate if you could take the time to answer these questions below. Of course, this is completely voluntary. If you do not feel comfortable answering any of the questions, just skip it. Thank you for your time. Please return this by Wednesday, Sept. 2nd.

Child’s name ___________________________ nickname ___________________________

1. Please list all the adults living in your household.
   name ___________________________ relationship ___________________________

2. Please list all the children in your family living in your household along with ages and gender.
   name ___________________________ age ___________________________ gender ___________________________

3. Does your child speak/understand a language other than English? If so, what?

4. What are your child’s major strengths?

5. Tell me about your child’s interests and after school activities?

6. Describe your child’s feelings about school.

7. How does your child get along with other children?

8. Do you see your child as having any problems with learning?

9. Please describe any recent family event/changes that might affect your child (new siblings, divorce, deaths, etc.)

10. How do you feel, I, the teacher, can best help your child this year?

11. Is there anything else you think I should know about your child?

12. Would you like to become involved in the classroom or school? How are you interested in helping?

Please attach any additional comments or questions on another sheet of paper. Thank you.
APPENDIX I

Julie Boyd’s Reflections on her Planning for the Dinosaur unit
Julie Boyd's Reflections on her Planning for the Dinosaur unit

Thoughts on dinosaur unit

I know the kids will basically be pretty excited - dinosaurs are fascinating for them - the unknown, the first names, who knows for sure.

I pulled some old favorite books that I knew the kids would enjoy - Patrick's Dinosaurs, Dinosaurs Come - as well as some newer books. I also have some informational books which I'll show.

Some books are for my reference - one I have: Reading Young Children by Stemple. This has some basic facts in it that helped me think about how to perhaps divide the weeks up. Many of the activities didn't appeal to me - I used Janice Van Cleve's Dinosaurs for Every Kid for many of the activities.

I reviewed the books, then reviewed the course of study. I knew I could easily take in making measuring concepts from the math area, especially using rulers. I need to incorporate facts and make some way as well - I'm not sure yet how I'll do that. If I'd just do a research with some activities, possibly that will be best.
Social studies will be incorporated through discussions about how the Earth has changed over time to continental drift - we will again discuss the 7 continents - oceans.

We will also incorporate discussion of the seasons as we discuss the 3 zones - please dinosaurs lived in - do they compare to one of our seasons?

Health is brought in thru the discussion of dinosaurs' teeth. As we talk about their teeth - how it helps us eat - they ate plants or meat - we will also look at a human's teeth - compare how many we have, have them make a graph of # teeth lost, etc. We can also talk about good dental hygiene at this time.

Science - By discussing fossils, we will incorporate some science objectives such as change over time - how different factors affect change. (The activity about laying soil, sand, fish tubes - also there is one where you plot different liquids in a container - oil, syrup, water - how they separate.)

Classification is also an objective which we will cover as we discuss how dinosaurs are classified as herbivores, carnivores, warm or cold-blooded - legged or bent-humped.
The first week will be a lot of us gathering —
very little activities, attention. 60 percent of
the day may be used for dinosaur-tours, The rest
for "supervised" activities.

The second week I'll have the kids begin
some activities — making of dinosaurs, doing art.
I'll wait & see where their interest is — what seems
to work best. Perhaps split class into 3 groups
for the 3 areas of dinosaurs & have them make
mural depicting what it was supposed to be like —
what dinosaurs they'd see.

In some way, I'm struggling with all
this — trying to decide how to put it all
in. It doesn't break down so easily to the
kind of small, doable, easy weekly lessons. I'm
sure I'll be adjusting as I go along.

I've also found a great series on the internet
about dinosaurs — possibly by some math activity
as well as some basic info for me. It gave
me well-organized info about dinosaurs — it's all
in one place.

Another thought — I recently also looked for a
number of poems/songs to share after the holiday
tours. We also have a #7 song for St.
Patrick's Day.
APPENDIX J

Student-led Conferences:

Form for Setting goals with the Teacher and Parents, and

Welcome Letter to Families
Student-led Conferences

What do you want your parents to notice about your work hanging on the walls either in our halls or classroom?  

my snowman and my snowman, writing

Reading -  
- share your good book In the Dinosaur's book is a lot harder for me.  
In reading, I would like to get better at reading more books from the 2nd grade room

With your parents, set a goal for reading. What can you do at home to help reach this goal?  Read more chapter books.

Writing -  
- share at least one piece of writing

In writing, I would like to get better at add more detail to my writing - we talked about what she meant. She'd like to use more descriptive words like frosty morning.
Set a goal for writing with your parents. How can you accomplish this goal? **Make letters and numbers correctly.**

Math -

Share something you have done recently in math. What do you want your parents to know about this? **I can do patterns really well.**

In math, I would like to get better at **doing double digit stuff in the classroom.**

Set a goal for math. What is something you can do at home to help reach this goal? **Learn multiplication.**

Share something from the snow unit we recently completed. **My penguin book.**

Share any other portfolio picks.

What did you like best about student-led conferences? Use the back of the sheet if necessary.

**Enjoyed sharing her work with us - we enjoyed it too!**
Welcome to student-led conferences!

Please help your child find his/her portfolio. Everything you need is in it. Select a table either in our room or a room on either side of us - somewhere where you and your child may talk without being disturbed. I will be around to visit with you.

Please take a pencil with you. You will be setting some goals with your child and will be writing them down.

Please leave everything here today - all the work, portfolios, goal sheets. I will make copies of your goal sheets and send them home next week. The portfolios will be sent home later in the year.

Thank you for coming. Your child has worked very hard to get ready. I hope you enjoyed this - I learned so much about your child as we prepared for this day.
APPENDIX K

Daily and Weekly Schedule: Example of Lessons Plans for One Week
Daily and Weekly Schedule: Example of Lessons Plans for One Week

Lesson Plans for Monday

Sign out Globe Area

9:21  music 1:45-2:30

Language - Daily anyone else

9:15 - 9:45

Quiet work choice time. Day is set for big math tubs, drawing, unfinished work from day before. (Check unfinished tub for work that needs to be done.) While students are working, complete lunch count, attendance, collect any papers from students.

9:45 - 10:20

Meeting (big area quiet time)

Shared reading: Ladybug on the Move

Interactive writing - write two sentences with children's help.

10:30 - 10:45

Morning work choice: Go to gym - act out how bugs move

- Ladybug

10:45 Clean up; have children come to meeting, share a poem, big book

10:55 Have children get coats, make sure lunch boxes are in tub. Have children take tub down. Students leave for lunch recess through back door in hall.

11:00 - 11:15 Lunch/straighten room

11:15 - 11:30 Duty Cafeteria Outside

12:00 At noon, the students line up and wait for teacher to bring inside. You need to go out the back door by Cross's room and bring them in. Take them for drinks and restroom by back kindergarten room.

12:00 - 12:30 Meeting area (big area quiet time) Remind children of necessity to read quietly. Have SSR. Come to meeting for activity

12:30 - 12:45 Shared Reading Science activity - Do you think your ladybug will fly or crawl away? Graph - discuss which is more

12:45 - 1:30 Journal-writing

Go outside - give each ladybug - graph what it actually did. Recess - SSR Share a poem I one IT

1:30 Clean-up, first trip busers need to get coats and bags to take to music with them. They will be dismissed from there.

- Look for other pocket chart + code chart

2:30 First trip bus is dismissed (wait for announcement - children should be ready) Dismiss walkers and pick-ups at 2:40. Second trip bus students are dismissed at 2:45 to playground or hall depending on weather.
Lesson Plans for Tuesday 9-22

Graph in- Will ladybugs swim?

Art 19:05 - 11:00

8:15 - 9:00  Quiet work choice time. May select from big math tubs, drawing, unfinished work from day before. (Check unfinished tub for work that needs to be done.) While students are working, complete lunch count, attendance, collect any papers from students. Students should begin getting on the CCC computers and continue the process throughout the day.

9:00 - 9:30  Meeting (big area quiet time). Have David J and David B get on CCC computer during this meeting

9:30 - 9:55  A bug can fly. Ladybug, whose yeg, What does a bug need to be a bug? (Talk with children about ways to make a bug)

9:55 - 10:05  Clean-up, have children make sure their lunch boxes are in tub, get coats and other things ready for lunch recess. They will go outside directly from art.

10:05 - 11:00  Art

11:00 - 11:15  Lunch

11:15 - 11:30  Duty - outside if weather permits, if not, inside in big area. Cafeteria

12:00  At noon, the students line up at door outside Hootman's/Swanson's room and wait for you to bring inside. They can get drinks and restroom stops at back half by kindergarten room.

12:00 - 12:45  Meeting area (big area quiet time). Remind children of necessity to read quietly. Have SSR until 12:30. Bring to meeting to share books.

Reading group
- discuss results of graph. Go to gazebo - have diff. water container, set up. See if they swim - can get out of container. Release all ladybugs - talk a what happens to them in winter
- butterfly book - draw picture of caterpillar. Have them help finish the sentence. The caterpillar ..., all write that sentence in their book
- choice, if book & bug can ... are completed

2:00  Quiet clean-up, quiet time in big area. Sharing of journals, daily work. Read books. Guess how many split peas will fit on spoon. Delino in retg

2:30  First trip bus students dismissed (wait for announcement - children should be ready) Dismiss walkers and pick-ups at 2:40. Second trip bus students are dismissed at 2:45 to playground or hall depending on weather.
Lesson Plans for Wednesday: 9-23

8:15 - 9:00 Quiet work choice time. May select from big math tubs, drawing, unfinished work from day before (Check unfinished tub for work that needs to be done.) While students are working, complete lunch count, attendance, collect any papers from students.

9:00 - 9:30 Big area quiet time - call to meeting Share:
- Is It Alive? What do we need to live?
- Class sort: insect/not insect
- Interactive writing - write two sentences with children's help.

9:30 - 10:50 Morning work choice:
- go to stage - 3 children make an insect - see attached chart
- everyone have chance to do.
- stamp paper (red markers, stamp 3 circles - add details to make it an insect.

10:50 - 11:00 Clean, meeting to get ready for lunch.

11:00 - 11:15 Break

11:15 - 11:30 Duty Outside if weather permits Cafeteria

12:00 At noon, the students line up outside by rear door and wait for you to bring inside. Drinks and restroom stop at back hall by kindergarten room.

12:00 - 12:30 Meeting area (big area quiet time). Remind children of necessity to read quietly. Have SSR.

12:30 - 12:45 Shared Reading Insect ABC book model spoon activity

12:45 - 2:00 Afternoon work choice.
- Math paper
- A bug can ... jump. What does? List/draw/write.
- Mid. guess @ they peer on response.
- Choice time - read/see cut

2:00 Big area quiet time. Call to meeting to discuss silent clean-up. When room is clean, return to meeting for shared reading. Discuss end results of peer on response.

2:30 First trip bus is dismissed (wait for announcement - children should be ready) Dismiss walkers and pick-ups at 2:40. Second trip bus students are dismissed at 2:45 to playground or hall depending on weather.
8:15 - 9:00 Quiet work choice time. May select from big math tubs, drawing, unfinished work from day before. (Check unfinished tub for work that needs to be done.) While students are working, complete lunch count, attendance, collect any papers from students.

9:00 - 9:30 Meeting (big area quiet time).
- Shared reading: 
  - Big area quiet time: 
  - Interactive writing - write two sentences with children's help.
  - Interactive reading - read "How do people move?"

9:30 - 10:50 Morning work choices:
- Poem: "I Can Illustrate". Write a poem, circle time.
- Math papers
- Journal writing - write about their favorite way to move.

10:50 - 11:00 Clean, meeting to get ready for lunch.

11:00 - 11:15 Break

11:15 - 11:30 Duty outside if weather permits, if not, inside. Cafeteria

11:30 - 12:00 Lunch

12:00 At noon, the students line up outside by Cross's doors and wait for you to bring inside. Drinks and restroom stop at back hall by kindergarten room.

12:00 - 12:30 Meeting (big area quiet time). Remind children of necessity to read quietly. Have SSR until 12:30.

12:30 - 1:00 Sr Get ready for lunch.

12:40 - 1:00 SSR: read group

1:00 - 2:00 Afternoon work choice.

1:00 Use Mexico as a model to write about insects. Use ladybugs, ants, bees. Discuss pattern.

How do insects move?

Insects move in many ways

How do ladybugs protect themselves? ladybugs make a stinky smell

2:00 Big area quiet time - have children clean room silently, then come to meeting. Share:

2:30 First trip bus is dismissed (wait for announcement - children should be ready) Dismiss walkers and pick-ups at 2:40. Second trip bus students are dismissed at 2:45 to playground or hall depending on weather.
Janet Brown's Lesson Plans for Friday

9:25  gym 12:00-12:55

8:15 - 9:00  Quiet work choice time.  May select from big math tubs, drawing, unfinished work from
day-before. (Check unfinished tub for work that needs to be done.) While students are
working, complete lunch count, attendance, collect any papers from students.

9:00 - 9:30  Meeting (big area quiet time).
Shared reading:
Interactive writing - write two sentences with children's help.

9:30 - 10:50  Morning work choices:
- W.B. - I see At - draw pict.
- match paper - circle words
- staple 3 circles - turn into bag (from Wed)

10:50 - 11:00  Clean, meeting to get ready for lunch.  Children go outside until 11:30.

11:00 - 11:15  Break

11:15 - 11:30  Duty  Outside if weather permits, if not, inside.  Cafeteria

11:30 - 12:00  Lunch

12:00  At noon, the students line up outside by rear door and wait for you to bring inside.  Take immediately
to gym.

12:00 - 12:55  Planning time

12:55 - 2:00  Afternoon work choice.  Have children get drinks, got to restroom before returning to class.  After
putting up their lunch items, come to meeting for instructions.

- make hexagons in the box
- rhyme w/ bug - order correct drawpix

2:00 - 2:30  Big area quiet time.  Have a silent clean-up.  Meeting: Share

2:30  Have first trip bussers ready to leave.  Wait for announcement.
2:40  Walkers and pick-ups dismissed, 2nd trippers go outside at 2:45 if weather permits.
APPENDIX L

Copy of *One It* Poems Used in Classroom Activities
Copy of "I One It" Poems used in Classroom Activities

Name ________________________

I one it
I two it
I three it
I four it
I five it
I six it
I seven it
I eight it
Oh, so you ate the old black bug!
Oh, so you ate ________ old black
APPENDIX M

Copy of Derek’s Writing
Draw:

Write:

Gym is fun. You got to climb the wall.

Math is computer. You got to be able to read.

Field trip. You got to do homework.

My fave math topic is interior.

1/2/28
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