

THE NATURE OF TALK IN A KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM:
EXAMINING READ ALOUD, GUIDED READING,
AND LITERATURE DISCUSSION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the nature of talk that surrounds the literacy events of read aloud, guided reading, and literature discussion in an early childhood literacy program. This research describes how teachers promote and sustain talk, and describes the characteristics of student talk in each event. Examining the broad themes of talk that emerged provided a window into students' thinking and meaning making in these pedagogical strategies.

This naturalistic, qualitative inquiry borrowed from two research traditions: case study and grounded theory. Five kindergarten students were audio-taped for three months as they participated in whole class read aloud, small group guided reading, and small group literature discussion. Transcriptions of talk, interviews, and field notes were analyzed to uncover the interactions between students and teachers, the content of talk, and the meanings students created. Analysis included open and selective coding and constant comparative analysis to reach data saturation. Data were further scrutinized through the lenses of conversation and discourse analysis.

Research findings suggest that each literacy event helped nurture behaviors and knowledge necessary for developing readers. In guided reading the teacher dominated the talk, focusing on reading skills and strategies. In the read aloud and literature discussion group, the students had more influence over the direction of the conversation,

and generated comments and questions, expressing their understanding of the text, ideas, and opinions. During the course of the three month study, students in the literature discussion group demonstrated they were capable of sophisticated conversations, at times edging into critical literacy. The teacher played a crucial role in fostering student's thinking in all events through her choice of text, the type of questions she asked, and how long she paused for student talk.

The overarching implication of this study is that the literacy task, as defined by the teacher, determines the kind of language she uses. This in turn, impacts the language and learning of her students. Further discussion addresses implications about the role of talk about text in emergent literacy programs.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Children, in their own ways, teach us about the language of our classrooms. We have to ask what discursive histories have made it possible for them to say what they say.
(Johnston, 2004, p. 3)

Peter Johnston's statement calls to mind the significance of our children's language. Researchers have been interested in classroom talk for many years, establishing talk as a vital conduit for thinking and learning (Barnes, 1975; Gilles, 1993; Smith, 1988). Yet, in the busy life of the classroom, it is easy to overlook the importance of examining children's language as evidence of the meanings and understandings they are creating. It is easy to overlook how children's language can reveal the discursive histories of our classrooms; how it reflects the role of the teacher, the strategies implemented, and the discourse community of the classroom.

This research study examines and describes the talk children and teachers use in three specific literacy events—read aloud, guided reading and literature study. This study provided an in-depth analysis of the literacy practices in place in most early childhood programs to evaluate their importance as well as to explore the potential for learning for young children.

Significance of the Study

In 2001, the National Reading Panel (NRP) issued a report on the state of reading in the United States. This report included a review of past empirical studies concerning reading and offered suggestions for future educational policy. The inception of President

Bush's No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) shortly followed. This act, in an effort to close the achievement gap by requiring more school accountability, instigated mandatory state and national high stakes standardized testing. Thus, our schools have come to reflect a culture of testing; the focus of early childhood curriculum has moved from developmentally appropriate practice to one of test preparation. This trend concerns many educators. Kauerz and McMaken (2004) note that some professionals worry the testing emphasis will, "trickle down to younger children, perhaps culminating in inappropriate assessment practices for these children" (p. 2). This has strong implications for the possibility of shifting practice in early childhood.

In the initial stages of preparing for my dissertation research, I witnessed this shifting focus in early childhood education first hand. I observed seven classrooms from two cities, and though I saw master teachers engaging children in a variety of literacy activities, the teaching practices I observed were highly teacher focused. Little or no time was given for open discussion among students. I was struck by what I perceived to be the changing tone of early childhood practice.

This study stemmed from those classroom observations as well as from research I piloted in the spring of 2004. As an instructor of undergraduate education majors in an early childhood literacy block, I was plagued by the sense that my college students underestimated what young children could do in terms of experiences with literature. This prompted me to conduct research inquiring into the nature of talk for kindergarten students in a read aloud literature discussion group. I found that kindergarten students responded thoughtfully to sophisticated literature. They asked questions for clarification and challenged ideas put forth by the text. They made deep connections between texts

and their personal lives. Their conversations helped them create profound understandings, and allowed them to experience rich and engaging texts that they could not access independently. Though small literature discussion groups are usually thought of in relation to older students, my study looked at this practice with emergent readers, not yet independently reading.

The talk of this group of kindergarten students as they navigated through texts illustrates Harste, Burke and Woodward's (1981) assertion that the age of 3-6 years is a phenomenal period of growth for all children and that, for younger and older children, "differences reside more frequently in the product than in the process of literacy" (p. 12). They too, began their study certain that young children knew more about print than the literature reflected.

My piloted research revealed the benefits of a read aloud literature discussion group, which led me to question its place in the broad scheme of literacy pedagogy. Recently, many researchers in early childhood literacy (Evans & Saint-Aubin, 2005; Skidmore, Perez-Parent & Arnfield, 2003; Wood & Prata, 2001) have focused on one aspect of literacy pedagogy such as read aloud, guided reading, or literature discussion in isolation. However, research has failed to take a broad view of current literacy curriculum and pedagogy as a whole. Ascertaining how literacy events fit together and build on one another, as well as understanding the meanings children create in each event, teachers can more effectively meet the pedagogical needs of their students.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The questions that guided this inquiry concern the nature of talk and learning in an early childhood literacy program. This section describes the theoretical underpinnings

that provided a foundation for my research. I begin with a brief description of the context of this inquiry, and then describe the areas of emergent literacy, language development and talk, literacy events, and theory and practice in reader response.

The context of this study is a multiage classroom, with a focus on a small group of five kindergarten students. In multiage classrooms, students spanning three grades are intentionally placed together in one learning environment (Gaustad, 1992). Children in multiage classrooms often stay with one teacher or one team of teachers for multiple years, and because of the age span, have the opportunity to interact with children of varying abilities and backgrounds (Anderson & Pavin, 1993; Katz, 1992). The benefits of multiage programs are well established. Research has shown that children in multiage programs have more positive attitudes about school and themselves as learners (Veenman, 1996), and experience less feelings of competition (Reese, 1998). Additionally, research has shown that younger children are able to accomplish more sophisticated tasks with the modeling and assistance of older children (Association of Childhood Education International, 2001). The five children involved in this case study were in a multiage classroom that included children in kindergarten through fifth grade; this was their first year in this classroom.

Early childhood education emphasizes active learning, relevant and meaningful learning experiences, and curricula that reflect the needs, interests, values and cultures of the children in the classroom (Bredekamp, 1997). These beliefs stem from the theories of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Piaget and Vygotsky were similar in their insistence that children learn and develop when they interact with the environment and people around them (Hunt, 1969); their work resonates throughout early childhood education today.

Piaget was a cognitive psychologist who believed that interaction plays a fundamental role in a child's learning development. Piaget used the concept of assimilation, accommodation and equilibrium to describe how a child learns from his environment. Children assimilate when they take in new information; accommodation occurs when this information is accepted and results in a change in schema (Singer and Revenson, 1996). Equilibrium is the process children go through to balance assimilation and accommodation. Piaget held that knowledge grows through a progressive construction of logical structures into existing structures. These ideas became the impetus for the constructivist theory of learning. Piaget believed that children's learning only occurs when children make active constructions or revisions to existing schema (Singer and Revenson, 1996).

Piaget (1970) argued that the social interactions a child engaged in directly influenced a child's thinking. Rogers (1987) explains that Piaget, "regarded peer interaction as a means for helping children decenter their thinking from one particular egocentric perspective and to consider multiple perspectives" (p. 219). Piaget informed our understanding of how the child's environment influences cognitive processes.

Lev Vygotsky was another significant theorist who influenced our understanding of early childhood education. Vygotsky believed that development is a continuous, life-long process too complex to be defined by stages of development or learning (Driscoll, 1994). Vygotsky (1978) premised that learning occurred when humans internalized their social interactional processes. He examined how culture influenced cognitive development in an individual context and believed that all learning can be traced to social interactions rooted in culture. Vygotsky's theory of human development is known as the

Socio-cultural Theory of Learning. Vygotsky believed that an individual's mental development, thought, language and reasoning (cognition) were direct results of these interactions

Vygotsky's theory of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is fundamental to understanding early childhood literacy. Vygotsky (1978) described the zone of proximal development as the distance between the most difficult task a child can do alone and the most difficult task a child can do with help. When children engage in learning experiences situated closely to their potential development with a little additional help, learning occurs more rapidly. As students interact, learning is occurring within their Zone of Proximal Development.

The work of constructivists such as Vygotsky and Piaget helped establish a foundation for emergent literacy to thrive. Sulzby (1989) defines emergent literacy as "the reading and writing behaviors of young children that precede and develop into conventional literacy" (p. 273). And in the four decades since Marie Clay (1966) coined the term to describe young children's approximations with reading and writing materials, the field of emergent literacy has exploded. Emergent literacy posits that children's literacy development begins before children even enter school. The interests of emergent literacy researchers include such topics as the link between early oral language and later reading success (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999; Strickland & Morrow, 1988), the critical importance of social interaction with peers and adults to advance literacy development (Sulzby, 1991), and the reciprocal processes of reading and writing (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). The field of emergent literacy has influenced curriculum development to include children's active engagements with literacy. Consequently, literacy pedagogy in schools

incorporates more real literature engagements with meaning making at the heart of instructional.

The issue of how children acquire language has been a topic of high interest to researchers. M.A.K Halliday (1980), a prominent language development researcher, posited that young children construct language knowledge to meet their needs. Children use expressions necessary to communicate with those around them. Judith Lindfors (1987) builds on this theory stating that the family is critical in a child's language development simply by engaging the child in real communication in a variety of contexts. Real communications compel children to use language in authentic situations, and in doing so, children stretch beyond comfortable language structures by approximating structures they have observed. Social interaction is critical at home and school because these meaningful exchanges allow the child to experiment with complex language structures. Halliday (1978) explored how social contexts influence children's language development and understanding.

Interest in language led researchers to examine the relationship between language and literacy. Loban (1976) contributed greatly to our understanding of the connection. Loban found that children who were identified as having high language ability in early childhood, showed greater ability and flexibility in the ways in which they expressed their ideas and conversed with others, higher reading and writing success, greater vocabularies and advanced listening competencies. He found that oral language abilities in early childhood can serve as an indicator of subsequent literacy success. This seminal study informed further exploration of oral language and literacy and school performance. Researchers (Dyson, 1983; Egan, 1996; Sulzby, 1986) looked to understand early literacy

and oral language links furthering Loban's assertion that very young children's oral language impacts children's later success with writing and reading. Thus, research documents the importance of fostering oral language, and confirms that children gather knowledge about written language as their knowledge of oral language develops and increases.

In addition to research that investigates how language develops is research that examines teacher and student talk in the classroom (Barnes, 1975/1992; Barnes & Todd, 1977/1995; Gilles, 1993; Pierce, 1986; Smith, 1988). Douglas Barnes (1975/1992), an important talk theorist, argues that when children have the opportunity to talk the benefits are greater than just communication and language development; thinking and reflection are strengthened. Barnes states:

Teachers have become so habituated to thinking of language in terms of communication that many have ceased to consider that it also performs important subjective functions, since it is the major means by which we consciously organize experience and reflect upon it. (p. 84)

Children who engage in experiences that promote language use are more likely to be meta-cognitive about their thinking processes, allowing them to reach deeper levels of thinking and learning. Barnes' (1975/1992) classroom research led him to the conclusion that children used exploratory talk as they collaborated in small groups. Exploratory talk is often characterized as hesitant and repetitive with numerous false stops and starts. Students using exploratory talk frequently make hypothetical statements which lead to reflection, and then either acceptance or rejection of the hypothesis. Exploratory talk is necessary because it allows children to negotiate meaning, test ideas, and deepen thinking.

Furthering this work, Barnes and Todd (1977/1995) examined how students use talk to make meaning. They found that small group work can change learners by changing how they actually learn:

The transformative potential of learning in small groups derives from the opportunities which conversations between peers, particularly discussions oriented towards learning, provide for the generation by learners of new ideas, new insights and more complex points of view. (p. 135)

Learners alter the way they learn through the cyclical exchange of viewpoints, questions, hypothetical statements and answers so that a joint inquiry is formed. Barnes and Todd found that meaning is not set, rather it is open to change, dependent on the context and the exchange of ideas. Meaning is constructed by all members of the group, not one individual. These findings influence how we view classroom practices today.

Finally, it is necessary to examine the theory of reader response in order to understand this inquiry. Historically, the popular reader response paradigm of the 1930's known as New Criticism, argued that texts alone hold meaning. Rosenblatt (1938/1995, 1978/1995), and later, Bleich (1978) and Fish (1980) believed that meaning lay in the transaction between the minds of the readers and the words of the text.

In 1938, Louise Rosenblatt published the land mark book, *Literature as Exploration*. Rosenblatt believed that literature can be enjoyed in and of itself, and at the same time “have a social origin and social effects” (p. 23). The social nature of reading led Rosenblatt to assert that there exists an interaction between readers and the texts they encounter. This *transaction* is what determines the meaning of the text—meaning exists when the written text meets a reader's mind. Eventually Rosenblatt (1969) came to name this combination the *transactional theory of reading*. Rosenblatt (1938/1995) named the meaning created by the interaction between the text and the reader, a *poem*. Rosenblatt

explains that readers, “crystallize out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience, which he sees as the poem” (p. 12). The poem is the experience, shaped by the reader and guided by the text.

Rosenblatt’s work informed our understanding of how valuable student response to literature is to the literary experience. Because students link what they encounter on the page with past experiences, the response of each individual is unique—a unique poem. Reader response theory has grown in depth and breadth in recent years. Scholes (1985) described reader response as incorporating interpretation and criticism to contrast the text we create against the text we encounter. And lately, reader response theory has taken a critical perspective (Bean & Moni, 2003; Lewis, 2000) where researchers look at response to determine the critical stance of students. Though the literature on reader response is varied, most of it addresses older readers.

Finally, I would like to point to the work of Peter Johnston. His book *Choice Words: How our Language affects Our Children’s Learning* (2004), greatly contributes to our understanding of how teachers’ language impacts the emotional and learning community of the classroom. Using specific examples of teacher language, he shows how the discourse of the classroom can encourage literacy acquisition in students and foster strategic thinking. Johnston carefully illustrates the powerful interactions between students and teachers and the subsequent meanings created. Though I designed this study before reading this book, Johnston’s work became critical to how I examined data. His work framed my findings.

Purpose of the Study

This study serves many purposes. First, this inquiry seeks to uncover the nature of the talk that emerges from both teachers and students during the literacy events of read aloud, guided reading and literature discussion groups. Many early childhood programs may implement one or more of these practices. By observing these three events juxtaposed against one another for an extended period of time, I am able to explore the characteristics of student and teacher talk to uncover the meanings created as well as the roles the participants adopt.

The second purpose of this study is to highlight the role the teacher takes in promoting and sustaining classroom talk. Studying how teachers facilitate conversation, addresses the importance that teachers play in impacting students' learning. The teachers involved in this research carefully articulated their purposes and procedures for their literacy curriculum. Thus, the examples provided in this research allow us to see how a set purpose determines the kinds of talk and procedures that teachers initiate.

Finally, this research attempts to designate the characteristics of student talk in each literacy event. The talk students engage in exemplifies the meanings and understandings they create in each event. Knowing what meanings and connections students make establishes the importance of the event, and helps us place it more appropriately in our curriculum. Furthermore, it provides a window into their thinking and learning process.

The Research Questions

Generally speaking, this inquiry concerned the nature of talk for students and teachers as they interacted during a literacy block. The following broad question guided this research:

- What is the nature of kindergartener's talk in read aloud, literature discussion, and guided reading?

To fully unpack this question, the following sub questions were also investigated:

1. How does the teacher promote and sustain talk?
2. What are the characteristics of student talk in each literacy event?
3. How do the themes of talk that emerge differ among literacy events?
4. How do the themes of talk in each literacy event provide a window into students' thinking and meaning making?

Methodological Procedures

The questions stated above guided the design of this inquiry—a naturalistic, qualitative inquiry. I observed a group of five kindergarten students during literacy time for three months (February, March and April). I recorded, transcribed, and analyzed the talk of students and teachers during the literacy events of read aloud, guided reading and literature discussion. Data collection methods included transcribed literacy discussions, teacher interviews, and detailed field notes. I intensely scrutinized field notes to maximize data discovery using Corsaro's (1981) method for coding broad themes. Borrowing analysis techniques from grounded theory, all data were coded using open, axial and selective coding and constant comparative analysis made certain that analysis reached saturation. Additionally, memoing occurred monthly to help record general

thoughts and impressions about the theories that developed. Memos are “written records of analysis related to the formulation of theory” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 197). The analytical lenses of content and discourse analysis were applied to the transcripts to provide a unique lens through which to view findings.

Ethical considerations were of paramount importance to this research. The design of this research was carefully considered with peers in my field. I went through Institutional Review Board (IRB) training to ensure that I understood the considerations of human studies, and then received IRB approval from both the University of Missouri and Stewart College before beginning my study. The next step I took to ensure ethical research was to contact the appropriate gatekeepers and receive entry into the field. Confidentiality has been maintained throughout the duration of this study. All names and locations have been changed from the early stages of the research until the final reporting of findings. Finally, I included the perspectives of the research participants as the research unfolded. I brought in transcripts and memos to the teachers involved in this case to consider their insights and to increase my accountability.

Limitations

As with all research, there are several methodological limitations that must be addressed to ensure the integrity of the study. First, as a naturalistic inquirer, the instrument of choice for data collection is the human (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I believe that there are multiple realities to be captured in every research endeavor, and the human is the only instrument available to take in the variability. However, the possible inherent beliefs and biases of the researcher create limits to human instrumentation. Steps to ensure credibility were taken to attend to the value-laden nature of human

instrumentation. Research limitations and the steps taken to counter these limitations are explored further in Chapter 3.

Second, the timeframe of this inquiry only afforded me a limited amount of time to conduct my research. My study lasted three months in the second semester. Therefore, I was not present at the beginning of the year to observe how these literacy events were established. The way in which the teacher set these events up could influence how children in this group were talking about texts. Their growth over time was also neglected. Furthermore, I observed literacy two days a week. In my absence, there were sessions that were not captured.

Third, this inquiry resides within a case study tradition; I followed one group of five children for twelve weeks. This research addressed this specific group of children and the findings demonstrate the talk experiences for these children only. As with all qualitative research “naturalistic generalizations” (Stake, 1995) and transferability can be orchestrated by the reader.

Finally, it is important to note that Stewart Elementary is a private school. As a private school, parents pay tuition for their children to attend. In general, paying tuition for elementary school may speak to the economic status of most families and to the importance of education in the home. Research has shown the link between socioeconomic status and increased literacy skills.

Organization of the Study

In keeping with the current dissertation reporting protocol, this study is broken into five chapters. Chapter One gives an introduction to the study and provides an overview of the research process that was undertaken. It includes the significance of the

study, the relevant theoretical underpinnings that served to frame the research, the research questions, and methodological procedures and limitations.

Chapter Two undertakes a comprehensive review of literature pertinent to the study. To fully understand the theoretical principles that frame this study, I review four areas: emergent literacy, language development and talk, early childhood literacy events, and theory and practice in reader response. These areas establish a framework with which to view the findings.

Chapter Three describes the pedagogical stance of the researcher and provides a thorough look at the methodological procedures taken. It consists of the guiding questions, the context of the study, data collection and analysis techniques, and the ethics and limitations of the study.

Chapter Four recounts the findings of the study. It begins with in-depth context for the study including the setting, the teachers, the students, and the curriculum concerned with the case. Next, each literacy event is described in terms of protocol, the teacher's role, and the characteristics of student talk. Chapter Four concludes with an explanation that contrasts the themes that emerged in all three literacy events and explores the meanings made in each event.

Chapter Five provides readers with an overview of the entire research enterprise. A statement of purpose is included along with a description of the methodology procedures taken, and a summary of the findings. Chapter Five concludes by discussing the implications of these findings for classroom teachers, teacher educators and future research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The questions that guided this qualitative research concern the nature of talk and learning in an early childhood literacy program and have foundations in four areas within the literature: emergent literacy, language development and talk, literacy events, and theory and practice in reader response. The first area, emergent literacy, begins with a historical glance at emergent literacy theory and practice and then describes what emergent literacy means today. This area provides a theoretical lens with which to view the subsequent sections on language and literacy. The second section, language development and talk, examines how oral language develops, the role oral communication plays in literacy, and language as tool for learning and thinking. The next area, literacy events, describes common practices and recent research in literacy instruction including read aloud, literature discussion, and guided reading. This area concludes by examining the role of the teacher in implementing literacy events and considers pedagogical implications for creating a rich early childhood literacy program. The final area, theory and practice in reader response, includes a discussion of the origin of reader response theories, how learners create meaning through explorations with literature, and concludes with studies that highlight teachers' endeavors to foster student response.

Section I: Emergent Literacy

Theories of child development have a long history of shaping early childhood literacy programs and pedagogy. At the beginning of the last century, the concept of

reading readiness based on Gesell's maturational theory (1929) was popular. Later, the theory of behaviorism put forth by Skinner (1974) emphasized reading as measurable behavior that could be taught by task analysis and reinforcement (Gillen & Hall, 2003). More recently, the socio-cultural and constructivist theories of Vygotsky and Piaget have directed early childhood literacy epistemology (Aldridge, Sexton, Goldman, Booker, Werner, 1997). Their work led researchers and educators to studies that have helped defined what we now think of as emergent literacy. The purpose of this section is to discuss the relevant contributions of theories of early childhood literacy education to current practice.

A Historical Perspective of Early Literacy

At the turn of the century, the maturational theory of learning, stemming from the work of Arnold Gesell (1912) found great favor in education. According to maturationists, the development of a child was an automatic, biological process that occurred in logical, sequential stages over time (Hunt, 1969). Proponents of the maturational theory believed that if young children are healthy and typically developing, they would naturally acquire the knowledge necessary for reading as they grow physically. This theory had implications for school readiness. According to maturationists, school readiness was indicated when children mastered such tasks as counting, alphabet reciting, and identifying letters. Thus, best practice for those who subscribed to this ideology included exposing children to visual discrimination and motor development tasks in preparation for reading and writing in first grade.

From this and the work of other seminal researchers (Huey, 1908) came the notion of readiness; this idea of reading readiness dominated education and literacy

practice for the first half of the twentieth century. Readiness was discussed in relation to a child's mental age—research of this period indicated children were not ready to begin to read until age six and a half—and had major implications for pedagogy (Gillen & Hall, 2003), including a hard line drawn between readers and non-readers, and focused literacy instruction towards matching and identification. The notion of reading readiness was reinforced by the prominence of behaviorism. Behaviorism deconstructed reading as a set of specific skills that could be taught to children through reinforcements and failed to take into consideration children's agency, self-discovery and the interrelated nature of learning to read and write (Gillen & Hall, 2003). As a result of the popularity of research guided by reading readiness and behaviorism, researchers avoided investigations that examined children's thinking processes and understandings about reading.

Frank Smith's seminal *Understanding Reading* (1971) helped extend the umbrella of what was considered early childhood literacy research. In this book, Smith maintained that reading was a highly complex process involving more disciplines than psychology (the main discipline of reading research at this time) considered. Furthermore, Smith contended that meaning was not contained in the text; rather, children create meaning based on their experiences. Smith's work opened the door for research that examined children's intricate understandings about print and helped determine the importance of understanding print as interactive and multifaceted (Gillen & Hall, 2003). The field of early childhood literacy, or emergent literacy was about to make a name in educational research.

The Theory of Emergence

Beginning in the 1970's and lasting into the 1980's, early childhood literacy research began exploring "the strategic behavior of children engaging in literacy" (Gillen & Hall, 2003). Researchers such as Clay (1966) and Goodman (1976) began looking at young children's behaviors during reading and writing experiences. They believed that even if children were engaged in "wrong" literacy actions, the actions still gave information about the child's developing understandings. Soon after, researchers turned their attention to what happened with even younger children (Lass, 1982; Baghban, 1984) to demonstrate that literacy learning began before the onset of schooling. Researchers began to encompass a broader understanding of early childhood literacy.

Marie Clay (1966) was the first to use the term, emergent literacy. Sulzby (1989) defines emergent literacy as "the reading and writing behaviors of young children that precede and develop into conventional literacy" (p. 273). Hiebert and Rafael (1998) suggest that the first real movement of emergent literacy came from social constructivists who believed learning is a function of both cognitive and social processes. This perspective stemmed from the work of cognitive psychologists, socio cultural theorists and sociolinguists. The views from these fields are similar in their insistence that children learn and develop when they interact with, and interpret, the environment around them (Hunt, 1969). Thus, literacy was beginning to be understood as a social process of development.

Piaget, a cognitive psychologist, was guided by the desire to figure out how knowledge develops and grows. Piaget regarded cognitive conflict as the impetus to change and, thus, the development of children's thinking. Cognitive conflict, or

disequilibrium, occurs when children fail to assimilate new information into existing schema, or knowledge. Piaget used the concepts of assimilation, accommodation and equilibrium to describe how a child learns from his environment. Singer and Revenson (1996) define these characteristics:

According to Piaget, adaptation is the most important principle of human functioning. Adaptation is the continuous process of using the environment to learn and learning to adjust to changes in the environment. It is a process of adjustment using complementary processes, assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation is the process of taking in new information and fitting it into a preconceived notion about objects or the world (p. 15).

Accommodation occurs when cognitive structures change in order to accept the new information from assimilation. In an attempt to balance assimilation and accommodation, a child will seek equilibrium between self and the environment; it is this process that leads a child to change existing schema (Singer & Revenson, 1996). Piaget determined that assimilation, accommodation, and equilibrium work together to form the basis of intellectual growth. He held that children's learning only occurs when children make active constructions or revisions to existing schemata. Piaget (1970) argued that social interaction influenced the development of individual thought processes. Rogers (1987) explains that Piaget, "regarded peer interaction as a means for helping children decenter their thinking from one particular egocentric perspective and to consider multiple perspectives" (p. 219). Piaget informed our understanding of how children interpret their experiences. However, Piaget is often criticized for viewing development as a linear process.

Vygotsky differed from Piaget in his approach to development. Piaget believed that intellectual development progresses in stages of cognitive growth. Vygotsky, however, believed that development is a process too complex to be reduced to stages

(Driscoll, 1994). Vygotsky examined how culture influenced individuals' cognitive development.

Vygotsky believed that all learning has its roots in a social sphere. Vygotsky helped educators view literacy as a socially mediated process. He maintained that humans used signs, including written and oral language and number systems, to mediate an individual's social participation (Razfar & Gutierrez, 2003). He believed humans are unique in their establishment of specifically defined cultures that influence development. Vygotsky (1978) held that a child's learning is dependent on the culture in which that child is immersed. This model of human development has come to be known as the socio-cultural theory of learning. The emphasis on social and cultural influence is what set Vygotsky apart from his educational contemporaries. Vygotsky believed that an individual's mental development, thought, language and reasoning (cognition) were direct results of the culture in which that individual lived because development occurs through social interactions with peers and families. Vygotsky (1978) explained:

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of ideas. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals (p. 57).

He understood the individual's cognitive abilities as the result of a long history of social interactions.

One of the theories with the greatest impact on early childhood teaching pedagogy is Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) defined ZPD as "The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined

through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (p. 86). That is, the distance between the most difficult task a child can do alone and the most difficult task a child can do with help. When children engage in learning experiences situated closely to their potential development assisted by a teacher or peer, learning occurs more rapidly. Teachers and peers help each other with the *process* of social and cognitive development, rather than the mastering of a subject (Baker-Sennet & Haminson, 1996). As students interact in a social context, they have the potential to operate within their zone of proximal development.

The work of theorists such as Vygotsky and Piaget helped establish a foundation for new perspectives in early childhood literacy to surface. Marie Clay was one such pioneer. Clay (1966) introduced the term emergent literacy to describe young children's engagement with reading and writing materials before they are actually considered independent readers and writers, the field of emergent literacy has exploded. Emergent literacy research has proven established the link between early oral language and later reading success (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999; Strickland & Morrow, 1988) and that children's literacy development starts even before children receive formal schooling (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999; Clay, 1991; Ferreiro & Tabersky, 1982; Holdaway, 1979; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Additionally, emergent literacy has noted the critical importance of social interaction with peers and adults to advance literacy development (Sulzby, 1991). Seminal research has shown that children who have many meaningful interactions with print before entering school will be more successful in school literacy work (Downing, 1970). And research suggests that even though children develop literacy skills and understandings at different paces and in different ways (Strickland & Morrow,

1988), reading and writing skills are reciprocal processes and can develop at the same time (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). This research has helped teachers, administrators and researchers understand that children need active engagements with literacy to develop to their full potential. As a result of emergent literacy research, literacy pedagogy in schools incorporates more engagements with real literature with meaning making at the heart of instructional goals.

Storybook Reading and Emergent Literacy

The value of children's experience in hearing texts read aloud has been documented for over 50 years (Teale, 2003). Storybook reading is a widely implemented social routine in households across economic and cultural backgrounds (Flood, Jensen, Lapp & Squire, 1991). As they listen to stories, children form understandings about story structures, book language, the literary conventions necessary to comprehend and understand texts, and language structures not typically found in everyday conversation (Cochran-Smith, 1984). Bus, van Ijzendoorn, and Pellegrini (1995) inquired into how read aloud effects children's later literacy development by performing a meta-analysis of 29 studies where parents read to their children. They found a strong correlation between children who hear texts read aloud and later language, literacy, and reading growth.

Shirley Brice Heath conducted seminal research highlighting the importance of story book reading. Heath (1982) found that reading interactively with children helped them become better readers. Heath uncovered three significant findings in a study that examined the effects of story reading with preschool children in different communities. First, in communities where children did well in reading throughout elementary school, Heath concludes that parents read interactively to their children, making sure that

children understood as they went along. Heath's second finding suggests that reading to children, but not interactively, led to early reading success that faded as the children got older. Finally, Heath found that children who did poorly in reading throughout school, had parents who valued education, but did not read stories to them. Heath's work pointed to the importance of read aloud with young children.

Familiar storybooks often serve as the texts for young children's first independent reading approximations. Sulzby (1988) examined 2-5 year old children's responses to repeated readings of storybooks. She found that when these children were asked to read, almost all of them complied independently with books that were familiar to them. Other children preferred to read interactively with an adult. And after 11 months of storybook reading in day care, all the children appropriately approximated at reading independently. These findings, and similar findings from other research endeavors, suggest that children gradually internalize the storybook reading interaction until they can engage in the activity independently. This has implications for the amount of exposure schools provide children to storybook reading.

Many researchers hold that the power of storybook reading with children, whether at home or at school lies in the talk that surrounds the experience. A significant relationship has been established between preschool children's participation in talk about texts and children's literacy skills (Snow, Tabors, Nicholson & Kurland, 1995). The nature of talk and the quality of conversational interactions range extensively. Teachers' styles, the interaction they foster during and after the reading, their focus and content of talk, and their encouragement of children's involvement are all factors that influence the outcomes of storybook reading (Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Teale & Martinez, 1996). In

an effort to understand children's meaning making and response during storybook reading, Martinez, Roser and Dooley (2003) reviewed studies of children's responses to literature and noted that five characteristics emerged: 1) children's responses to literature centered on both the text and on the children's transaction with the text; 2) children have response profiles, or their own ways of making meaning from the story; 3) responses differ depending on the age of the children; 4) the types of responses offered change when the stories are familiar, and 5) responses reflect the interaction of the adult in the storybook experience. Analysis of teacher and student talk led to the discovery of these findings.

Storybook reading research has delved deeply into the impact social and cultural differences have on the experience. Findings indicate that adults with low literacy skills need to be taught both the value of storybook reading to children and the process of how to read aloud in a way most beneficial for children; significant growth in children's language and text understandings followed interventions (Edwards, 1989; Whitehurst, et al., 1988). Other findings show that parents make accommodations in their read aloud when their children have language delays or problems reading; children's interaction and levels of engagement often depends on the kind of text, and children create textual understandings based on the cultural expectations of the home bedtime reading experience (Flood, et al., 1991). Several experimental studies that examined the effects of repeated storybook reading as a daily part of classroom practice found that children scored higher on assessments of comprehension, vocabulary and decoding than in classrooms where storybook reading did not occur (Bus, et al., 1995; Dickinson & Smith,

1994; Senechal, Thomas & Moniker, 1995). Additional research into how storybook reading correlates with future conventional reading is ongoing.

Recent Interests in Emergent Literacy

The work of pioneers such as Piaget, Vygotsky, and Clay provided a basis for the emergence of research on social learning. Shirley Brice Heath (1983) conducted a 10-year ethnographic study of literacy and families. She examined how different communities and cultures influenced children's literacy understandings. Following children from their preschool years into schools, Heath found that children's early experiences were greatly interrelated to how they did in school. And Taylor (1983) spent three years exploring how the understandings about literacy that children create at home follow them into school. Taylor introduced the term "family literacy". At approximately the same time Cazden (1982), a sociolinguist, was interested in determining the interaction between how classroom experiences and climate affects students' learning. She found that many external factors influence how and what a child learns. A student's inner representations of knowledge, as well as a student's classroom life, which consists of interactions between the student and teacher, all play a part in the learning that occurs. These seminal studies illustrated a new concentration on the social nature of literacy and laid the foundation for recent interests in emergent literacy.

Sociolinguistic research is interested in determining how language and social contexts influence how meaning gets communicated (Rogers, 1987). Recent sociolinguist research (Eckert and Rickford, 2001; Walsh, 2001) has explored how social identity, gender, and power issues impact ways of speaking and critical discourse. These

topics have become more frequent in early childhood literature as well (Vasquez, 2003) as researchers explore issues of social power structures with young children.

In her keynote address at the Harste-Burke Retirement Conference, Deborah Rowe (2005) suggests that early childhood literacy research shift its focus to include social practice perspectives, which will offer researchers “a more multifaceted view of early literacy learning” (p. 4). When literacy is understood as a social practice then instead of looking only at literacy outcomes, the participation of young children becomes the focus of literacy involvement. At the heart of social practice perspectives is the belief that literacy involvement should include consideration of the social and cultural ideologies of the children it studies (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Gee, 2001). Gee (2001) explains this shift in focus:

In light of recent reports on reading (National Reading Panel, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) that have tended to treat reading quite narrowly in terms of psycholinguistic processing skills, I argue that such a broad perspective on reading is essential if we are to speak to issues of access and equity in schools and workplaces. I also argue that reading and writing cannot be separated from speaking, listening, and interacting, on the one hand, or using language to think about and act on the world, on the other. Thus, it is necessary to start with a viewpoint on language (oral and written) itself, a viewpoint that ties language to embodied action in the material and social world. (p. 714)

Gee contended that when children understand the discourse of the classroom they begin to understand what literacy processes are valued and they take on roles of power. Rowe explains the notion by saying children “try on identities as particular kinds of readers and writers and take up or contest social rules and procedures that organize their participation” (p. 4). Thus, it is beneficial to understand children as literacy learners within the structure of the classroom and the social positions they entertain.

Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) argue that intertextuality should become a focus in understanding children's reading and writing processes; they explain intertextuality:

As people act and react to each other, they use language and other semiotic systems to make meaning, to constitute social relationships, and to take social actions. Intertextual relationships are constructed by people as part of how they act and react to each other. In order for intertextuality to be established in reading and writing events, a proposed intertextuality must be acknowledged and have social significance. The social construction of intertextuality occurs within a social ideology that influences which texts might be juxtaposed and how those texts might be juxtaposed, by whom, when and where. (p. 330)

Bloome and Egan-Robertson explain that teachers and students can use intertextuality to explain themselves as readers, to validate other events as sources of information, and to build and sustain the cultural ideology of the class. This has significance for our youngest learners because we can begin to understand their literacy development far earlier than children operate independently in reading and writing.

Recent interests in emergent literacy research emphasize the social nature of literacy practice, community and cultural influence on literacy, and literacy as it connects to other areas of learners' lives. Gillen and Hall (2003) delineate what this shift means for emergent literacy: 1) literacy cannot be separated from language as a whole or from its cultural discourses, 2) when literacy is understood as emerging from children's home and community, there is a much wider idea of what literacy encompasses, and 3) the relationship between literacy as social practice and literacy in school must be examined.

Summary of Emergent Literacy

Popular theories of learning and development have shaped early childhood literacy curriculum and agendas. The first fifty years of the twentieth century produced literacy research that was dominated by reading readiness, or the belief that children

mature chronologically into reading, and behaviorism, the belief that children develop literacy skills sequentially through systematic reinforcement.

The research of social constructivism in the late 1960's and early 1970's laid the foundation for the birth of emergent literacy. Researchers in the field of emergent literacy began to explore the interrelationship of reading and writing, and to examine the role of oral language in literacy development. The focus for literacy research shifted from isolated instruction and skill development to understandings constructed through social engagement. Storybook reading became of a major focus in the field of emergent literacy. Researchers found that through storybook engagements children develop understandings concerning the rules of reading; they develop a sense of story; they respond to literature in meaningful ways; and they experience meaningful oral language engagements. More recently, researchers have begun to explore social participation and critical literacy with very young children. Subsequent sections of this literature review examine children's active engagement in literacy acquisition, the role of language in cognitive development, and language as a tool for thinking and learning.

Section II: Language Development and Talk

This study examines the talk of young children as they engage in various literacy events. In order to examine early childhood literacy, one must comprehend the nature of language acquisition and development and how language is used in the classroom for thinking and learning. Halliday (1980) put forth a model describing three ways in which children learn to use language: learning language, learning through language, and learning about language. His model of language development suggests that children ascertain these aspects of language through interaction with others in various situations.

Later, Jerry Harste (Egawa & Harste, 2001) extended Halliday's model. He noted that optimal learning takes place when children are learning language, learning through language, learning about language, and learning to use language to critique. Though Harste directed this model towards older students, it is relevant for young children as well.

Young children are learning and developing language at a rapid rate. They need relevant, meaningful opportunities to explore and learn from talk. Douglas Barnes (1975/1992) states, "we cannot consider language in the classroom only in terms of communication, but must also consider how children themselves use language in learning" (p. 19). This parallels Frank Smith's (1982) notion that talk can be used to extend thinking and deepen meaning. He argues, "language permits thought to fold back on itself; the product of thought itself becomes an object that thought can operate upon" (p. 65). Thus children learn language by using it and listening to the language of others; they enhance thinking and meaning-making through language, and come to understand the intricacies of language by talking.

Acquiring Language

The process by which children acquire language has been a topic of high interest to researchers for decades. Mabel Rice (1989/1996) notes the remarkable achievement of language when she states, "Sometime during their second year, most children begin to talk, and in apparently little time they are adept at using language to fulfill their needs and carry on social interactions" and that "no explicit teaching seems to be necessary" (p.3). Children use expressions to convey meaning so that communication with those around them is possible. Rice posits that there are three components involved with

language learning. One is the language to be learned. The second is the predispositions that a child brings to language acquisition, and third is the environmental setting, or speaking context, in which the child is surrounded. Rice contends that these three variables interact in children across cultures and different languages with general similarity, although individual variability is an important factor in learning language.

Judith Lindfors (1987) offers an overview of early language acquisition, touching on Rice's language learning components, highlighting the importance of the social setting:

We know that the most important people in a young child's language environment, his family members and care givers, do not provide him with a rigorous language 'curriculum'. Rather, they engage with him and with each other (in his presence) in real communication in a wide range of contexts and situations. These typically involve linguistic structure far more complex than the child controls (p. 93).

Social interaction is important in both a child's home and school experience because every opportunity for "real communication" allows the child to experiment with increasingly complex language structures. Lindfors explains that almost every child has the capacity to build, in a very short time, "a deep-level, abstract, and highly complex system of linguistic structure" (p. 97). Interaction with others is significant in facilitating language growth.

Halliday (1980) believed language is learned through social interactions with other language users and that young children construct knowledge of language to meet their own needs. Halliday (1975, 1978) focused his attention on the process by which children use language to make meaning. He considered linguistics as a whole comprised of the semantic, or meaning system, the syntactical, or grammatical system, and the phonological, or vocal systems. He asserted that early language development was the

child's attempt at functioning and communicating within surrounding contexts. Halliday (1978) looked at characteristics that influence language. These characteristics include: field, or the setting and subject matter of the situation in which language is used; the tenor, or the relationships between the participants; the mode, or the form of communication used such as questions and answer and patterns of speech; and finally the register, or the language used in a particular situation. Register is determined collectively by the field, tenor, and mode, including what is taking place, who is involved and the role language plays in a particular situation. Halliday explored these characteristics to determine how people use language in social contexts to exchange meanings.

A longitudinal study conducted by Hart and Risley (1995) examined children's language development at home, into school and the subsequent effects on learning and cognition. Hart and Risely investigated how children learn to talk by recording them in their homes from the time they began their first utterances. They found that children's ability to learn language depended greatly on the amount of talk they were exposed to in the home; furthermore, their language development at age 3 was related to their literacy achievement at age 9. Children who were given choices and asked questions to evoke a response had greater success in literacy at school. Later analysis of data (Hart & Risely, 1999) indicated that children who had both exposure to spoken language and multiple opportunities to listen, converse, and respond to others, developed language most efficiently and effectively. Hart and Risely suggest that when children participate in active conversation, they engage higher levels of cognition. This has implications for literacy and classroom practices.

Oral Language and Literacy

Loban (1976) contributed greatly to our understanding of how language and literacy develop in school. In a longitudinal study, he followed 211 children from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Each year every child was studied in terms of reading, writing, listening and speaking. Loban found that children who were identified as having high language ability in early childhood, consistently showed greater ability and flexibility in the ways in which they expressed their ideas and conversed with others, higher reading and writing success, greater vocabularies and advanced listening competencies. This is significant because it illustrates the importance of oral language abilities in early childhood as an indicator of subsequent literacy success.

Loban's seminal study served as the impetus for further exploration of oral language and literacy and school performance (Dyson, 1983, 1987; Egan, 1996; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). These researchers turned their attention specifically to how children acquire oral language and literacy. Strong links were drawn from very young children's oral language and beginning explorations with writing and reading. Dyson conducted multiple studies with kindergarten through second grade children to examine the effects of early language on writing development. In one study, Dyson (1983) set up a writing center and asked children to "write" without giving them explicit directions. She found that oral language is an essential part of the early writing process and that children's approximations to conventional writing vary depending on their purpose. Talk was the vehicle that drove students' meaning-making when they actually wrote; talk provided students with a way to generate, organize, and then record that meaning on paper. Furthermore, Dyson (1987) performed a longitudinal study in urban elementary school

that looked at children engaged in “off-task” talking. She found that children helped each other extend and enlarge their worlds; they also offered each other critique of those worlds. She concluded that in order for writing time to be fully maximized, children need opportunities to talk and interact to construct and extend meaning.

Ferreiro and Taborsky (1982) and later, Teale and Sulzby (1986), have noted that children's literacy development begins before children start formal instruction in school. Literacy understandings are cultivated by social interactions with adults and the availability of materials such as books. These researchers further established that children's reading and writing abilities are interrelated, developing simultaneously rather than sequentially. They go on to state that language development in young children provides the foundation for reading and writing skills to develop. Hiebert and Raphael (1998) maintain that literacy learning is embedded in oral language. They state:

Oral language patterns are the means whereby young children access literacy. By access, we mean that children's first literacy events in school are primarily oral in nature, such as when teachers read books aloud or record on charts stories generated by the class. As teachers talk about the content and features of print in these literacy acts, children come to understand the processes, functions, and features of written language. Through talk, the secrets of literacy are revealed. (p. 77)

Hiebert and Raphael describe talk in an emergent literacy classroom as crucial to students' literacy development. They contend that language is the medium in which children learn to negotiate meanings, clarify and elaborate, solve problems, debate and question, and create and respond to print.

Thus, research documents the importance of fostering oral language and confirms that children use their knowledge of oral language to increase their knowledge about written language. Goodman (1989/1996) maintains that viewing language and literacy as

social-personal inventions has implications for teaching literacy as an extension of language learning. He states that it is “possible to think in terms of building on what children already know, working with them rather than at cross purposes” (p. 83). As language in use is explored in a functional context, so too can literacy.

Bruner (1983) examined the social role of language in school specifically in early childhood. He contends that the continuity between pre-verbal and verbal communication is related to a child’s experiences with language “formats”, or uses. Because of this, he advocated for schools to be structured to allow children opportunities to work in small groups, either in play or in group games. He believed social interaction in small groups was imperative for facilitating language acquisition; that children acquire social skills, understanding of mutual involvement and participation, turn taking, and how to extend meaning for others. Group interaction, especially when the interaction centers on play, has similar characteristics as the rules of conversation.

The relationship between language development, literacy and play has been well documented in early childhood in recent years (Dickinson & Tabors, 2002; Duncan, 2003). A study conducted by Dickinson and Tabors (2002) looked at the variables that influence young children’s language development. They concluded that parents who speak more have children with bigger vocabularies and that the amount of talk in preschool programs relates to children’s vocabulary development. Additionally, they found that the quality of language both at home and at school is a factor in development as well. Language development stems from language use. Because the best way to encourage children’s language use is through interaction with the environment and peers, play and group experiences are essential for language enrichment.

In light of recent reading reports that stress a connection between early phonological awareness and later reading success, it is worthwhile to examine a study by Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998). They found that the connection between early language development and later success in reading is greater than the connection between early phonological awareness and success in reading. Snow, et al., explained that early language development and early phonological awareness are themselves correlated.

They state:

Performance on phonological awareness tasks by pre-schoolers was highly correlated with general language ability. Moreover it was measures of semantic and syntactic skills, rather than speech discrimination and articulation that predicted phonological awareness differences. (p. 53)

And later:

What is most striking about the results...is the power of early preschool language to predict reading three to five years later. (p. 107-108)

Language development in young children affects all aspects of literacy development.

Indeed research has shown that these processes are powerfully interrelated.

Children's language learning is tied closely to their literacy development.

Children have to have opportunities to use language in order to develop literacy understandings and thinking. Sulzby states, "Teachers who rely too heavily on merely telling children the information they want them to acquire risk promoting mindless regurgitation of that information without depth of understanding or ability to extend it to new learnings" (p. 289). When encouraged, children can use language to construct cognitive connections and forge new understandings.

Language as a Tool for Thinking and Learning

Language and thinking are closely connected. Adding to the literature on oral language, researchers examined how and when children talk, the type of talk they use, and how it affects learning (Barnes, 1975/1992; Barnes & Todd, 1977/1995; Gilles, 1993; Pierce, 1986; Smith, 1988). Douglas Barnes (1975/1992), one of the most influential talk theorists, argued that when children have the opportunity to talk the benefits are greater than just communication; they strengthen thinking and reflection. Barnes (1975/1992) claims, “Teachers have become so habituated to thinking of language in terms of communication that many have ceased to consider that it also performs important subjective functions, since it is the major means by which we consciously organize experience and reflect upon it” (p. 84). Children who engage in literacy experiences that promote language use are more likely to be meta-cognitive about their thinking processes, allowing them to reach deeper levels of thinking and learning.

Barnes (1975/1992) observed four small groups of students as they navigated through text in order to determine how students use talk to create meaning. He noted that students use *exploratory talk*, as they “worked through their interpretation in collaboration” (p. 28). Exploratory talk is often characterized as hesitant and repetitive with numerous false stops and starts. Additionally, students engaged in this type of talk frequently make hypothetical statements which leads to reflection and acceptance or rejection of the hypothesis. Barnes claims that talk is a “means for controlling thought” (p. 29). The interaction between language and thought helps students learn more effectively when the primary goal of the learning experience is not the recall of teacher-fed facts.

Barnes and Todd (1977/1995) conducted a two-phase study in which they investigated how students use talk to make meaning. They found that there was indeed a connection between communication and learning and that small group work can change how learners actually learn. “The transformative potential of learning in small groups derives from the opportunities which conversations between peers, particularly discussions oriented towards learning, provide for the generation by learners of new ideas, new insights and more complex points of view” (1977/1995, p. 135). Learners alter the way they learn through the cyclical exchange of viewpoints, questions, hypothetical statements and answers so that a joint inquiry is formed. Barnes and Todd found that meaning is not set, rather it is open to change, dependent on the context and the exchange of ideas. Meaning is not “owned by one participant in a discussion but something that...is constructed and reconstructed by all of them (p. 141). These findings have significant impact on classroom practices today.

Gordon Wells closely examined the relationship between meaningful literacy action, talk and text. Wells (1990) believed that the readers actively engage in texts in the following ways: performative interaction, paying close attention to the code of a text, such as proofreading; functional interaction, reading for a specific purpose, for example to follow a recipe; informational interaction, reading text to gather specific information about a topic; recreational, reading for pleasure; and epistemic interaction, an analytic mode of reading designed to interpret text. Wells argued that in order for students to become fully literate they had to “engage with texts in this way at all stages in their development” (p. 28). Young children benefit from these interactions with texts even before they are independent readers.

Wells (1988/1996, 1990) explored the concept of apprenticeships in literacy. Apprenticeships are an illustration of what Vygotsky (1978) discussed as learning by assisted performance in the zone of proximal development (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Wells (1990) believed that apprenticeships, or collaborations in literacy, must revolve around overt and explicit talk about texts and the thinking process involved in creating and interpreting them. In an apprenticeship, the leader guides, models, and explains the activity. However, the apprentice is not passive; apprentices are actively creating understandings about texts and the process of reading.

Wells' notion of apprenticeships in the classroom stems from his work with collaborative talk. Wells (1988/1996) describes collaborative talk as talk that allows one or more participants to "achieve a goal as effectively as possible" (p. 158). However, collaborative talk differs slightly from apprenticeships because in collaborative talk participants are typically equal in status, though this is not always the case. Generally, the goal of collaborative talk is met when learners meet the goals of a task, or when they are able to move on to the next step. In instances when one student has knowledge to share with another, that student becomes empowered. The student becomes the teacher. As students work together in collaboration on a task, they learn more about what they are engaged in, but they also deepen their thinking. Wells explains that even when learners are in disagreements, "participants in collaborative talk can not only learn from each other's differing knowledge bases, they can learn the need for disciplined thinking and develop some of the strategies for achieving it" (p. 160). Wells posits that oral interactions can lend themselves to the development of literate individuals due to the similarities of oral to written processes. They involve:

[A]ddressing the content of the task, the need to make one's intentions and one's understandings of the topics intelligible to another and at the same time to oneself...The tasks in relation to the talk which occurs make demands for planning and execution, which themselves become the subject matter of talk. (p. 165)

It is worth mentioning here, that collaborative talk is more directed than Barnes' (1975/1992) notion of exploratory talk, in which participants engage in rough draft, unplanned speech. Both have a place in contributing to a student's cognitive, linguistic and literate development.

Neil Mercer (2000), another British talk theorist, explores conversation in action and the intricacies involved in participating in talk with other individuals. He explains that when engaged in conversation, people are involved in an ongoing process of making sense of what the other person is saying. He explains,

[W]e never rely only on our knowledge of the basic meanings of words, or our familiarity with the grammatical constructions they use. As listeners, we always access some additional, contextual information, using any explicit guidance or hints provided by a speaker and drawing on any remembered past experience which seems relevant. As a conversation progresses, the content of what is said provides a contextual foundation for the talk which follows. (p. 44)

Mercer asserts that when trying to decipher language, context cannot be ignored. Context is not something that individuals construct independently; rather, people draw from relevant information sources to create common contextual knowledge. Mercer explains that these contexts help people establish and follow conversational ground rules.

One way to look at the talk that unfolds between teachers and students is through the lens of control and argument (Mercer, 2000). Mercer contends that we all use language to advance our particular agendas and interests; in doing so we try on the perspectives of those we are engaged in conversation. Rhetoric then, is a common tool to promote collective thinking in conversation. Mercer explains:

If we accept that the very nature of human dialogue requires us to say things in ways which take account of whom we are talking to, what we are trying to achieve and also what we think are the aims and views of the people with whom we are dealing, we come closer to understanding one aspect of the power of language as a means for minds to work together. (p. 103)

If people engaged in conversation rigidly stuck to one point of view, stated in the same way no matter who they talked to, they would demonstrate an inability to be effective. In student and teacher talk, the teacher is in the position to hold the power and thus control the content and format of the talk. Yet, powerful people do not always control the ways that knowledge is shared and considered; control often shifts due to the nature of response. Control is more important for understanding the context of the conversation than who is in power. The status of the participants' talk can be understood by exploring the notion of cumulative talk, disputational talk, or exploratory talk (Mercer, 2000). Cumulative talk refers to the occasions when speakers build on each other's ideas and extend meaning to create a shared understanding. Disputational talk refers to uncooperative encounters where participants are unwilling to take on the views of other participants. Exploratory talk, according to Mercer, is talk where participants remain constructive yet critical of the ideas put forth in conversation; agreement is the goal of the session. Analyzing talk for these components of conversation sheds light on the participants' thinking and dialogic processes.

Recent Studies about Talk and Literature

In recent years, there has been a re-emergence of interest in examining talk as a tool to shape thinking and to engage students in learning and understanding. This section highlights recent studies that examined the talk of teachers and students in the classroom.

Alexander (2005) offers a summative perspective on classroom talk, fueled by three research studies. First, a longitudinal comparative study looked at the connection between culture and pedagogy in five different countries. The second study focused on classroom talk and how ‘dialogic teaching’ effects that talk. And finally, a study of observational research in British classrooms looked at pedagogy and talk, and possible alternatives to teachers’ teaching methods. Alexander found that:

[T]alk is the most pervasive in its use and powerful in its possibilities. Talk vitally mediates the cognitive and cultural spaces between adult and child, between teacher and learner, between society and the individual, between what the child knows and understands and what he or she has yet to know and understand. (p. 2)

He contends that language both reveals and structures students’ thinking processes.

Furthermore, he found that although educators have an understanding of the importance talk plays in thinking and learning, opportunities for student talk that build cognitive processes are rare. Rather, he contends that teachers do most of the talking and consistently implement a “recitation script” (p. 2) of closed questions that discourages children from generating original thoughts. If teachers reject this closed-ended question format, they often engage in what Alexander (2005) refers to as pseudo-enquiry. This can occur when teachers understand that talk is important and so they pose open-ended questions that are unfocused and unchallenging. Often, these open-ended questions hide an agenda the teacher is still unwilling to let go. Alexander asserts that it is necessary for teachers to be thoughtful and purposeful in designing talk experiences in the classroom and that there must be a pedagogical repertoire of talk techniques including rote, the drilling of facts; recitation, the accumulation of knowledge and understanding through questioning; instruction, imparting information; discussion, the exchanging of ideas to

share information and collectively problem solve; and dialogue, cumulative questioning and discussion (no agenda) which guide and scaffold student thinking.

Children talk throughout the school day in many forums. Frequently, children participate in “talk-around-the edges” (p. 71, Dudley-Marling & Searle, 1991). This kind of talk is important because it is generally student-initiated and helps children to develop language and establish trust in the classroom. When students talk around the edges of school activities they use informal talk to communicate needs, ask questions, and transmit meaning. Dudley-Marling & Searle contend that by creating space in the classroom for talk around the edges, the entire climate of classroom talk will improve. Thus talk in learning situations will be more productive. Children talk during play and free time as well as social learning experiences as a way to deepen understandings and strengthen relationships. Recent literature on young children’s talk in relation to literature is particularly relevant to this review.

Frank Smith (1988) states that children struggling to join "the literacy club" can find a way in through oral language experiences. He claimed that in children, thought flows in terms of stories about events, people, and intentions and achievements, and that learning is achieved best when it is placed in story. Smith posits that exploring stories in the classroom through language, writing and reading is essential for developing students’ thinking and cognition; children’s literature is the obvious starting place.

The talk that occurs around children’s literature is powerful. King (2001) conducted an observational study exploring elementary-school-aged children’s talk in relation to children’s literature during literature circles and guided reading. She maintained that when children are engaged in “small group unstructured, expressive talk”

(p. 32), they increase their ability to express affective response to literature, while at the same time acquiring greater understanding of themselves and the texts they read. King maintained that literature circles were a chance for students and teachers to learn from each other. As students learn to work cooperatively and consider multiple perspectives through literature, they become better listeners and express themselves more honestly.

Similarly, Newkirk and McClure (1992) found that unstructured, expressive talk about books, or as they refer to it, digressions, are quite important for young children. These authors write, “I see how the digressions...can help to contextualize issues or readings; they can be a journey outward, into the lives of students that can allow a journey further inward, back to the topic or text” (p. 149). Often teachers feel the need to rein conversation back to the literature at hand, and while that is certainly necessary sometimes, Newkirk and McClure suggest teachers may be too quick to do so.

In a recent study of fifth graders’ talk resulting from a classroom reading of a historical novel about the Civil War, Raphael, Gavelek, and Daniels, (1998) found that students could sustain topics and genres of conversation over an extended period of time. Students frequently returned to themes or topics in their discussions, and each time they did their conversation went further in depth. Students used dramatic interpretation as a way to extend their engagement with the text. Raphael, et al. found that because of this, students were able to take on others’ viewpoints, thus establish multiple perspectives.

There has been a recent interest in using children’s literature and student talk as a way of exploring social and emotional issues. Koc and Buzelli (2004) examined the role of literature in the early childhood classroom. They maintain that teachers can use quality literature to support the moral development of the students they teach. They

argue that the use of children's literature can provide a basis for discussion that encourages critical thinking about moral issues. Children who participate in such discussions and literature experiences develop advanced moral reasoning abilities; abilities that may carry over in to their lives outside of school.

In a similar study Bhavnagri and Samuels (1996) examined the effect of exploring children's literature with social interaction themes on preschoolers' social cognition of peer relationships. Their study design included a group of 22 pre-school children in the experimental group and 22 in the comparison group. In the experimental group, 15 stories containing ideas of peer interaction were read and discussed. This intervention was conducted for one academic year. Bhavnagri and Samuels found that students in the experimental group had significantly higher scores on social cognition of peer relationships.

Children's literature has also been used as a forum for discussion about social issues. Wellhousen (1996) provided her early learners with books that portrayed characters in non-traditional gender roles to raise children's awareness of gender fairness and equity issues. She found that literature provided an avenue to help children think beyond what is simply presented to them and to engage in interpreting a deeper meaning. This article represents a growing trend towards literature discussion that asks children to take a critical stance.

Vivian Vasquez advances this notion a step further, opening up investigation into critical literacy pedagogy. Vasquez (2001) noted that there is a hole in the research on critical literacy practice with children in early childhood. She examined what happens when critical literacy is used as a theoretical tool to frame curriculum in an early

childhood program with 3-5 year old students. She held that adopting a critical literacy stance generates learning opportunities that allow students to explore problems associated with inequitable social practices and issues of difference and diversity. Vasquez (2001) found that when she rooted her instructional pedagogy in “questioning, contesting, and offering different perspectives in order to change inequitable or unjust situations” (n. pag.) learning became sustained and generative (original) and led students to attempt to effect change.

Summary of Language Development and Talk

The research on language development suggests that children thrive linguistically when they are given meaningful contexts in which to hear and use language. There is a direct link between children’s language and literacy development. Thus pedagogical consideration should be given to experiences that foster oral language development.

Recent theoretical explorations on talk have led educators to new understandings of the role talk plays in the classroom. Talk is a tool for communication, but also for thinking, learning and reflection. Studies show that talk allows students to delve further into the construction of personal meaning. And in social contexts, talk between students extends meaning making through interactions. Studies have shown that when students talk about literature, they are able to live through the literature on a deeper level.

Section III: Literacy Events

According to Juel (1991), there is a 90% chance that a child who is a poor reader at the end of first grade will remain a poor reader at the end of fourth grade. Children who are unsuccessful early on have a greater chance of developing a dislike for literacy, and read less in and out of school than more successful readers. Concern about children’s

literacy achievement levels has prompted current policy makers to turn their attention to developing state and national assessments for primary grades, kindergarten and even pre-kindergarten students. One thing that remains certain in early literacy development is that children need rich and repeated opportunities for engagement with literature (Taberski, 2000). To maximize students' engagement in literacy events they must be given the large blocks of time in which to participate; they need to be challenged by topics they care about; they need more modeling and demonstrating and less assigning, and they need to be immersed in a rich literacy environment (Allington & Cunningham, 1996). The following discussion reviews the literature on three literacy events that have become staples in early literacy programs.

Read Aloud

The term *read aloud* refers to the literacy event where teachers read a text aloud to students, either in large or small group situations. The value of reading aloud to young children is well-established as an important foundation for literacy (Hahn, 2002; Morrow, 1997; Morrow & Smith, 1990; Sterling & Shin, 2001; Trelease, 2001). A report issued by the National Commission on Reading found that “the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1984, p. 33). In read aloud, the teacher alone does the work of decoding the text, reading a wide variety of literature with fluency and expression (Hahn, 2002). In this, students are exposed to literature that they could not otherwise read independently. During read aloud children gain a greater sense of story and how language works, and they awaken their imaginations. Research suggests that read aloud requires young children to make sense of decontextualized language, or

ideas that are not in their immediate reality (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Heath, 1983; Snow and Dickinson, 1991). Discussing ideas outside of children's immediate context helps them make sense of the concepts and bring them into their sphere of understanding.

Jim Trelease (2001) reports that children at-risk for poverty are far less likely to be read to or have books in the home than more affluent children. Trelease explains, "The poverty child's lack of book time is evidenced in the child's attention span in kindergarten, where teachers reported the higher the education level of the parent, the longer the child's attention span" (p. xix). Reading aloud to children has been found to affect the interest and attention span of children with regard to books. A series of studies conducted by qualitative researchers examining the effect of read aloud on very young children's reading abilities found that reading aloud at home and at school dramatically increases a child's vocabulary (Senechal, Thomas, & Monker, 1995), allows greater control of syntax and literacy vocabulary associated with written texts (Purcell-Gates, McIntyre, & Freppon, 1995), enhances a child's ability to question and recall stories (Morrow & Smith, 1990), and boosts understanding of organizational structures found in narrative and informational texts (Duke & Kays, 1998). Tremendous gains in language development and early literacy concepts have been documented. Furthermore, Wood and Prata (2001) found in an observational study of kindergarten students, that the benefits children gain from a literature-rich kindergarten with read aloud at the heart of the curriculum may follow a child into the primary grades.

Mary Hahn's research (2002) illustrates the importance of the teacher's role in providing meaningful read aloud experiences for her children. She found that when teachers are conscious of the learning opportunities available to students during read

aloud, then the experience can serve as a model for reading; a shared learning time that allows students to test new ways of thinking; and a guided experience in ways of talking about texts. This, in turn, spills over into children's independent reading time. Hahn urges teachers to be readers themselves, to be metacognitive when they read aloud, and to put read aloud at the heart of the literacy program.

Read aloud is a social event. Klesius and Griffith (1996) explored the characteristics of lap reading with kindergarten students. Lap reading refers to the notion of young children being read to while sitting on the lap of an adult. Their study concluded that this adult-child experience is highly interactive. The adult makes frequent stops to elaborate, point out text features and illustration and ask questions. Young children interrupt the reading to comment, question, and share experiences. Read aloud is peppered with talk about the illustrations as well as the content of the text. And Morrow and Smith (1990) concluded that in a child's formative years smaller read aloud sessions were more beneficial; they found that children in one-on-one read aloud sessions talked more during the reading than children in a large group.

Read aloud can introduce children to new texts or it can revisit old favorites. It is a powerful way for children to develop crucial listening skills, language development and analytic abilities (Trelease, 2001). Perhaps most importantly, read aloud instills in children a love and appreciation for literature.

Guided Reading

McGee (2003) notes that reading aloud and discussing literature with students will call on their analytical thinking. However, she maintains that explicit instruction in phonological awareness and related skills will "ensure that children discover and

manipulate as well as learn to associate letters with phonemes” (p. 123). McGee has not been alone in her assertion that phonics and decoding skills must be explicitly taught to young children. Guided reading, based on the work of Marie Clay, is a procedure many teachers have turned to as a forum for teaching skills and strategies to young children. Clay (1985) described reading as a strategic process, and maintained that children need to read texts that allow them to problem solve. She used her theories and observations to design experiences that help struggling readers access prior knowledge, oral language, and reading strategies that emphasized metacognition and self-correction. Reading Recovery, a program designed to help students at risk, was the direct result of her work. However, it was not long before educators saw the value of such teaching techniques for all children. Thus, guided reading has come to be common pedagogy in elementary classrooms (Massengill, 2003).

Guided Reading is based on the premise that the teacher supports children in reading materials they cannot read independently. The primary goal of a guided reading session is to help students develop strategic reading strategies that extend into independent reading (Clay, 1985, 1991; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Tompkins (2003) further explains the logistics of guided reading, “children continue reading on their own while the teacher monitors their reading. After reading, children and the teacher discuss the book” (p. 18). Guided reading can serve as instruction for children and assessment for teachers as they keep track of the strategies readers use. Teachers can look for the following criteria to assess students and plan for instruction: one to one correspondence; strategies used; strategies not used; behaviors at points of difficulty (Clay, 1991; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Dorn, French and Jones (1998) further our understanding of how guided reading might function as a literacy event. These authors assert that guided reading must occur in the context of a balanced literacy program. The small groups formed for guided reading are based on the instructional needs of the students. Groups are fluid, changing with the changing needs of the children involved. Dorn, French and Jones (1998) outline the procedures involved in conducting a guided reading group. First, the teacher chooses a book to, “create a supportive context for building reading” (p. 43). Once the story has been introduced usually by means of a picture walk, the children read the book independently at their own pace. After the first reading, the teacher selects one or two important teaching points, “that will boost children’s learning to a higher level” (p. 44) based on observations of the children during the first reading. Finally, children are given the opportunity for subsequent readings to strengthen new connections made during the guided reading session. These authors describe what happens in guided reading as readers mature and become more successful. They explain, “the focus may shift to deepening [the children’s] understanding of the story. For example, the teacher may ask questions about the characters and the plot, the author’s writing style, characteristics of the genre, or literary devices used by the writer to express meaning” (p. 43). Guided reading is an instructional tool for teaching strategic reading. Routman (2000) cautions, however that though guided reading can be powerful, it has to be understood as only one part of a comprehensive literacy program.

Recent literature has illustrated the potential benefits of guided reading for children. Based on their work with the Four Blocks literacy program, Cunningham, Hall, & Cunningham (2000) found that guided reading instruction in small groups can create

independent, lifelong readers because it provides students with the skills and strategies they need to be successful. Taberski's (1998) work with second graders suggests that teachers have greater opportunity for individualized instruction through scaffolding in small group sessions. These small groups allow teachers to target specific needs of students and institute a strategic coaching style of instruction found to be effective teaching strategy with struggling readers (Pressley, 1998; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 1999). And in a study of adult learners with low literacy rates, Massengill (2003) found that the guided reading instructional framework positively influenced word recognition behaviors and strategies, which resulted in an increase in overall reading levels.

Skidmore, Perez-Parent and Arnfield (2003) analyzed discussion during guided reading across four elementary classrooms. They observed the same group of six-year-old children, visiting each of them three times. Their findings suggest that talk in guided reading is teacher-dominated. Teachers frequently ask questions to which they already know the answer, and commonly select the student who will respond. They argue that there are times in the guided reading session where teachers loosen their tight grip on the conversation and invite students to play a role in shaping the topic of conversation. In this, teachers gain greater assessment of their students. A study discussed earlier in this chapter conducted by King (2001) found that guided reading can serve as a potent tool for teaching children about text-related talk that can aid them in literature discussion if the teacher scaffolds and models response and questions, and then relinquishes control of the conversation to students. The quality of the literacy event experience depends on the quality of the teacher's scaffolding.

Literature Discussion

Literature study is informed by transactional theory. As far back as the early twentieth century John Dewey (1916/1997) advocated that learning is a social process. He asserted that learning isolated facts, “renders school knowledge inapplicable to life and so infertile in character” (p. 359). Rosenblatt’s (1938/1995, 1978/1995) theory that readers transact with the text to create meaning based on their individual life experiences, indicates that each person brings his or her background to the text to create the poem, or meaning. Therefore, every reader has a slightly different experience with the text. And Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural theory also suggests the small group interaction of literature discussion is be a powerful learning experience. Thus, discussion in a small literature group can be rich and varied, because all students bring unique perspectives and insights to the experience.

Barnes’ (1975/1992) theory of talk in the classroom establishes talk as an important means by which students both reflect on, and control, their thoughts. In literature study, talk can allow students the opportunity to think more deeply about a text and establish greater levels of comprehension. He explained that when students participate in the exploratory talk central to literature study they hypothesize. This compels children to check their hypothesis against what they already know, or what is evident in the text. Barnes states, “the more a learner controls his own language strategies and the more he is enabled to think aloud, the more he can take responsibility for formulating explanatory hypotheses and evaluating them” (p. 29). Literature study helps students learn understand because they generate ideas themselves.

Bakhtin (1981) emphasized the dialogic process that exists in language that ultimately establishes the “artistic potential” (p. 275). Bakhtin’s dialogic process refers to the various paths meaning has to travel before reaching its intended audience. The intended meaning, as it collides with the values and viewpoints of others, either connects, rejects, or accepts these new perspectives, thus changing the social discourse. That is, talk is influenced by our past interactions and conversations. This notion illustrates the importance of engaging students in dialogue to shape who they are and establishes implications for assessment in literature study.

The logistics of literature study are an important consideration. One structure begins with a book talk, students choosing a book that interests them, independent reading of the book, response of some type, and discussion in small groups with other students reading the same text (Gilles, 1991; Short & Pierce, 1990/1998). Literature discussion with younger children who are not yet independent readers will look different. Knipping and Andre (1988) describe a process by which students chose texts, read chorally with the teacher, and then discussed the texts. Because literature study offers students choice in what they read and the direction of the conversations, they have a great deal of autonomy in their learning. Schlick Noe and Johnson (1999) describe literature study as a literacy structure that centers on students in small groups, talking about their reading. Talk in response to literature allows students to explore deeper meanings of texts.

Ralph Peterson and Maryanne Eeds (1990) were pioneers in establishing literature-based programs that allowed students time to talk about books. They maintained that when students interpret texts, and when they share their insights and

connections, meaning is extended. Peterson and Eeds explored how literature discussion in groups can deepen thinking and enhance students' comprehension and understanding of the text. They explain:

Because a text's meaning is embedded in the mood of the story, in the ordering of time, in the creation of place, in the way the characters cope and develop, in the story structure, in the point of view, and in the use of language and symbols, these elements will surface naturally through dialogue. Working collaboratively, the group spends time contemplating meaning and digesting it. Group members help each other begin to *see* where previously they may have only *looked*. (p. 13)

In this explanation, Peterson and Eeds note that although the readers create meaning through the dialogue, they are guided by the text.

Kathy Short and Kathryn Mitchell Pierce (1990/1998) published *Talking about Books* at the same time that Peterson and Eeds' *Grand Conversations* came out. This book offers specific chapters by teachers about literature discussion groups, from logistics to ways to evaluate talk. Of particular interest to this discussion is Sheppard's chapter in which she outlines the structures in place in a kindergarten literature-based classroom including read aloud of the book instead of independent reading, whole and small group literature discussion and response to literature. In describing the benefits that come from a classroom whose curriculum revolves around literature, she states, "When teachers and children have regular opportunity to work together at making sense of the story, they practice their developing ability to respond and understand" (p. 80). This collaboration is essential to construction of meaning.

Pierce and Gilles (1993) furthered the discussion of literature circles and talk with their book, *Cycles of Meaning*. The title stems from earlier qualitative research by Gilles (1991) on two groups of middle school students labeled learning disabled that described students' talk in literature circles to be cyclical. Crawford and Hoopingarner's (1993)

classroom research examined literature discussion with early readers in a first grade classroom. They found that as students progressed from book to book, their talk became richer. This validates Gilles' (1991, 1993) notion that meaning cycles in a spiral motion across books. Crawford and Hoopingarner explain, "The conversations never really ended when students completed a book. They continued to connect conversations about books they had already read to the book they were currently reading" (p. 270). They found it useful to make procedural adjustments along the way, such as expanding the group size. They shared the data gathered from the literature circles with the students and recommend allowing children to analyze their own transcripts for behaviors and patterns of talk. Crawford and Hoopingarner found that students' talk could be divided into three categories: Literature Discussion, or discussion about the book; Conversation Discussion, or conversation that starts with the book then spirals to other topics; and Connections, or talk that represented students' personal connections. And finally, these authors found that, "meaningful books lead to meaningful discussions" (p. 272). This research highlights the possibilities for increased comprehension when young children talk about texts.

Rachel McCormack (1997) extended this notion when she qualitatively analyzed the talk of second grade peer-led literature discussion groups. These small literature circles read African trickster tales and operated without the teacher present. McCormack found that students discussed topics that stemmed from real life experiences as well as from students' imaginations. Because no teacher was present to guide the conversations, nothing was off-limits; however, students generally stayed on concepts that emerged from the text. Additionally, McCormack found that students were particularly interested

in trying to give a logical explanation to events in the texts that they know could not actually happen. She describes their conversations by stating, “they confronted their fears and addressed their confusions without intimidation or evaluation by an adult and they developed topics based on their own frame of reference” (p. 42). The opportunity to discuss these tales in literature study allowed students a greater chance to make sense of these fantastic tales than if the literature had simply been read aloud.

Strickland, Dillon, Funkhouser, Glick and Rogers (1989) conducted an exploratory investigation into literature response groups to determine the content of students’ talk, the functions of language in use and evidence of comprehension. Strickland was an outside teacher-researcher, while the other four involved in the study were elementary school teacher-researchers in first through third grade classrooms. Data were collected in each classroom over a two month period and analyzed. One of the most significant findings from this study showed that literature response groups allow students to be in an expert role. Students in literature response groups had more opportunities to talk, initiate and question, thus more control over the direction and content of the conversation. Strickland, et al., found that when children engage in literature response groups, they leave Mehan’s (1979) IRE pattern of conversation and talk more to each other.

Williams (1999) conducted a naturalistic study to investigate whether kindergarten students benefit from the use of literature circles in the classroom. The study examined a self-contained classroom with 27 children enrolled in a full day kindergarten program. The teacher in this study read aloud to her students and followed the read aloud with questions designed to elicit discussion. Williams found that students’

ability to monitor themselves in small groups increased, and that discussion prompted by the literature discussion format enhanced children's comprehension of the story, thus increasing their motivation to learn. The teacher Williams observed followed a literature discussion program called *Text Talk* designed to engage students in talk about literature. Thus, the focus and direction of the discussions were largely determined by the teacher.

Hansen (2004) examined the talk of 22 kindergarteners and their teacher as they engaged in an extended discussion about story. The conversations occurred after children listened to a picture book or chapter book in read aloud. Hansen found that the kind of questions the teacher asked, and the type of responses she gave encouraged literacy talk. Furthermore, she found that as the children grew in their efficacy of response, the teacher reduced the amount of support she gave the children. In this study, Hansen found that the teacher's talk determined how the children listened to the text and how they transacted with the text. She documented how children grow in literacy development through talking about texts.

The Role of the Teacher

Research has indicated that in order to be effective, teachers must understand their instructional roles (Dickinson, 2002). The role of the teacher is a great factor in how children navigate their literacy experiences. Marcon (1999) conducted an interview study that asked teachers to identify their beliefs and practices. She found that when teachers had a clear theory of how children develop and learn, no matter the teaching style, children were more successful. Findings from this study emphasize the importance of providing teachers with more opportunities for theoretical professional development.

Watson (1996) explored this notion of teacher efficacy. Watson maintains that teachers enter into holistic curriculum through practice, theory making, or belief formation. She contends that these three entry points are not hierarchical; all beginnings can be effective and “rejuvenating”. Watson explains that teachers can begin to develop whole language philosophy by simply using whole language strategies. Teachers may operate on borrowed practice and have the potential to move into owned practice. She also explains that teachers might enter whole language through theory making, “Theories can be active or inactive, and they can emerge from the work of trusted teachers, theorists, and researchers or from inquiry into our own practice” (p. 211). Thus as they collect information based on the theories they subscribe to, teachers become the answerers of their own questions, and finally move into the generation of their own developed theories. Finally, Watson explains that teachers can enter whole language practice through beliefs. Beliefs, though blindly accepted or carefully examined, are securely in teacher’s possessions. Understanding where teachers enter into curriculum helps understand the purposes they set and why they do what they do.

Recent research has further demonstrated the complexity of the teacher’s role in engaging children in experiences with texts. In a study of six teachers reading four texts to five-year olds, Martinez and Teale (1993) found that teachers differ in reading texts aloud to young students by the focus of what they talk about, the type of information they share, and the instructional strategies they use. The children responded according to how the teacher navigated these three factors with them. Brabham and Lynch-Brown (2002) examined teachers’ styles of reading aloud to children in grades 1-3, and the effects those styles had on children’s vocabulary acquisition and comprehension. They found that the

more interactional the teacher, the greater the gains children made in these areas. Other research (Martinez, 1985; McGee, 1992) indicates that teachers take on different roles as questioners, initiators, and respondents. Children respond according to the environments their teachers establish through these roles.

Summary of Literacy Events

The theoretical underpinnings of early childhood language development and literacy learning are reflected in the practices described above. It is important that teachers have an awareness of the nature and purpose of each event to maximize the learning potential of the students they teach.

Small group instruction is at the heart of literacy instruction. Research has shown that students are more likely to express themselves in read aloud, literature discussion and guided reading if they are encouraged to do so in groups of five to six students. Modeling and scaffolding students' understanding of how to access literature as well as what is expected of them in each event is of crucial importance. The research cited above demonstrates successful strategies for children's meaningful engagement with print. Furthermore, research emphasizes the critical role the teacher plays in implementing successful and significant literacy events. However, none of these studies looked at how these events work together to support a child's whole literacy development.

Section IV: Reader Response

Reader response theory has a long history. Proponents of the popular reader response paradigm of the 1930's known as New Criticism argued that texts alone should be central to examination because therein lies the meaning. Later response critics such as Bleich (1978), viewed literary works as mental products whose meanings are created

through the process of response and interpretation. Thus, meaning is constructed completely in the mind of the reader. Rosenblatt (1938/1995, 1978/1994), Iser (1978) Fish (1980) believed that meaning lay in the transaction between the minds of the readers and the words of the text.

Reader Response Theory

In 1938, Louise Rosenblatt published the seminal book, *Literature as Exploration*. Rosenblatt sought to “suggest how intimately the concepts of the social sciences enter into the study of literature” (p. 22). Rosenblatt believed that literature can be enjoyed in and of itself, and at the same time “have a social origin and social effects” (p. 23). There is always the potential for the text experience to be explored at a deeper level. Because of the social and personal aspects of reading, Rosenblatt asserted there is an interactive nature between readers and the texts they encounter. This *transaction* is what determines the meaning of the text—meaning is constructed as the written text meets a reader’s mind. Eventually Rosenblatt (1969) came to name this combination the *transactional theory of reading*.

Rosenblatt (1938/1995) named the meaning created by the interaction between the text and the readers mind, a *poem*. She explains, “The poem or the novel or the play exists in the transaction that goes on between the reader and text” (p. 27). Rosenblatt makes a strong distinction between the text and the meaning, or literary work. Later, Rosenblatt (1978/1994) clarified the term poem explaining that readers, “crystallize out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience, which he sees as the poem” (p. 12). The poem is the experience, shaped by the reader and guided by the text.

Rosenblatt's theory played a pivotal part in promoting understanding of how valuable student response to literature is to the entire literary experience. Because students link the signs on the page with past life and linguistic experiences, the response of each individual is unique—its own poem. Rosenblatt (1938/1995) explains:

[T]he submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates to him. The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment... These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination determine his interfusion (response) with the peculiar contribution of the text (p. 30).

Because reading is dependent on the cultural and social background of the individual, response to literature will be varied. Students' responses to texts are the result of their own construction of meaning, though still guided by the text.

Rosenblatt maintained that there is a difference in the focus of attention when readers engage with text; this difference determines whether a reader is taking what Rosenblatt called an aesthetic or efferent stance. The term *efferent*, derives from the Latin word *effere*, which means to carry away. Efferent reading then occurs when the reader needs to take something away from the text. The focus is on the concepts to be used after the text has been deciphered; the reader is interested in the information to be acquired. In contrast, in aesthetic reading, the reader's focus is on what happens during the reading event. Rosenblatt (1978/1994) explains, "In aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (p. 25). In aesthetic reading, readers pay close attention to what is being "lived through"—that is, the associations, feelings and ideas that the words conjure, as they read. To be classified as aesthetic, readers "listen" to themselves to create meaning. Rosenblatt explains that the distinction between aesthetic and efferent reading ultimately

comes from “what the reader does, the stance that he adopts and the activities he carries out in relation to the text” (p. 27), and that the stance a reader takes falls on a continuum. The reader’s stance affects response.

Iser also maintained that response to literature was less of an entirely personal connection in the reader’s mind, but rather a transaction between the literary work and the reader’s personal experience. In *The Act of Reading* (1978), Iser describes text as a series of unfinished instructions that a reader must complete. The reader does this through the process of predicting outcomes, visualizing the story, and living through character constructions. Iser refers to this as a reader’s wandering viewpoint, where a reader “travels along inside that which it has to apprehend” (p. 108). Iser contends that rather than a single viewpoint readers are aware of the differing viewpoints for consideration in any given text; these competing views challenge a reader’s initial perceptions. Reading, therefore, is a journey through social, cultural and historical perspectives (Beach, 1993). Sharing these viewpoints facilitates a reader’s dynamic, strategic role in the reading experience.

Fish believed that readers saw themselves as existing separately from the text. In his popular book, *Is There a Text in this Class* (1980) Fish contends that readers create the meaning of, and to some extent write, the texts they read. Fish turned away from the text and focused on the readers’ processes as the primary source of meaning; this idea was described as an interpretive community. Beach (1993) explains that for Fish, “the meaning of any reader/text transaction is a function of the interpretive strategies and conventions adopted by readers as members of a particular interpretive community” (p. 106). Fish challenged Iser’s belief that the text is an objective determinate given.

David Bleich is most often attributed with promoting the value of emotional response to text. Bleich was a fervent critic of the New Criticism theory. It was Bleich's contention that the subjective emotional response to texts actually leads to cognitive development (Beach, 1993). In *Subjective Criticism* (1978) Bleich discusses the subjective paradigm in which readers explain their understandings of the text in terms of their personal continuous response and how they negotiate those meanings with others. He posits there is a dialectical tension between private text experience and shared constructions. This tension can lead to a change in perception when dialectical negotiation occurs with others. Bleich asserts that students' response statements to literature serve to, "objectify, to ourselves and then to our community, the affective-perceptual experience" (p. 147).

Classroom Studies on Reader Response

Reader response theory has grown in depth and breadth in recent years, offering new possibilities for consideration. Cullinan, Harwood and Galda (1983) examined older students' response to literature to determine their developmental level of comprehension. They determined a direct relationship between how much students like a story, and how much they remember. They assert that reader response provides a way to assess the multi-dimensional nature of comprehension. Scholes (1985) described reader response as incorporating interpretation and criticism to contrast the text we create against the text we encounter. And lately, reader response theory has taken a critical perspective (Bean & Moni, 2003; Lewis, 2000) in which researchers look at response to determine the critical stance of students. Though the literature on reader response is varied, a great deal of it addresses older readers.

Early interests in reader response for young children determined that story is crucial for young children if they are to develop as respondents. Early studies explored how younger children focus on story events in retell (Applebee, 1978). Later, as understanding of what comprises response broadened, researchers looked at the complex interpretations and interactions of children responding to literature. For example, Victor Watson (1993) investigated what happened when young children read multi-layered texts. He found that when children responded to the read aloud multi-layered texts, they were able to go beyond deciphering print. Watson also determined that some picture-books had different levels of significance to children thus affecting the amount of response. That is, depending on their personal transaction with the text, children will respond differently and with greater depth the more they know about the concepts in the text. And finally, Watson developed new understanding of the benefits of re-reading complex texts as students went deeper into personal interpretation at each reading.

Kristo (1993) also examined children's response to read aloud literature in a first grade classroom. Her two-year observational study followed one teacher as she prepared and structured read aloud time. Kristo found that the teacher was central in orchestrating strong student response to literature. The teacher set the stage for response by carefully choosing quality literature. This particular teacher chose texts that supported her students' current thematic study to encourage cross-curricular connections. Furthermore, after the children examined authors' styles of writing, their own writings showed the influence of those authors. Kristo concluded that the kind of interactive environment established by the teacher, fostered student's ability to be literary critics and to articulate their own reading growth.

Sipe (2000) explored the responses of six, seven, and eight year old school children during story book reading. He found that 40% of children's responses were interpretive. He noted that when children talked about meaning and unfolding plot lines, their interpretations increased. Sipe (2000) concluded that children's responses to story book reading compelled them into evaluating, describing, and inferring about the story, characters and themes. Later research (Sipe, 2001) extended these findings to include young children's analysis of story. Children's response to literature is closely tied to the text. However, research has shown that very young children also make responses that demonstrate awareness of their own lives in comparison to the stories in the texts they encounter (Oyler & Barry, 1996; Sipe, 2001). Martinez, Roser & Dooley (2003) point out the importance of examining children's response to literature, the social nature of their responses, and the ensuing complexity of the meanings they make.

The recent interest in critical literacy stems from reader response theory. The work of Vivian Vasquez is unique in that it explores how very young children engage in critical transactions with the text. Drawing from personal teaching experiences, Vasquez (2004) explores issues of critical literacy in early childhood classrooms. Vasquez describes how teachers and students can negotiate a critical literacy curriculum. She asserts that texts offer strong opportunities for students to deal with specific social and cultural themes. Because students draw from their personal experiences to create meanings in texts, there are rich opportunities to push students to think beyond texts and deepen thinking.

Summary of Reader Response Theory

When students interact with a text, response naturally occurs. Pedagogical consideration of reader response concerns how to develop, foster and elicit students' response so that it can extend and deepen meaning making. The debate about reader response has focused on the relationship among the reader, the text, and the meaning that is created. Rosenblatt's early theories about reader response have greatly influenced our understandings of how students transact with text. Recent literature reflects the valuable role talk plays in extending and reshaping students' response to literature. However, most of the literature in reader response centers on older children. There is a need to delve deeper into young children's response to literature and their creation and expression of meaning.

Section V: Summary

The literature surrounding emergent literacy, language development and classroom talk, early childhood literacy events, and theory and practice in reader response is vast. This review of literature highlights the most relevant research pertaining to these topics.

The review above suggests that children in early childhood programs need rich and engaging experiences in literacy. Talk in the classroom can be a tool for communication, thinking, learning, and reflection. Studies show that talk allows students to more deeply construct personal meaning, and in social and literary contexts, talk between students extends meaning. Studies focusing on discussion and literature reveal that students are able to experience the literature on a deeper level when they have opportunities to talk.

Literacy events such as read aloud, guided and shared reading, and literature discussion groups with an emphasis on reader response are valuable pedagogies for children in early childhood programs. Current literature addresses these pedagogies in isolation. However, my study attempts to place the importance of each event as a part of a whole literacy program, as evidenced through the meanings children create in each. The discussion of early childhood literacy pedagogies leads to many questions. For example, what are the characteristics of talk in read aloud, literature discussion, and guided reading and how does the talk in each literacy event provide a window into students thinking and meaning making? What meanings do children make about literacy as evidenced by examining the talk in each event? What are the implications for a literacy program? This research also addresses the teacher's role in facilitating these literacy events. Research has been done on how teachers can engage students in various literacy events, as well as the teacher's role in discussion. However, the literature does not address the incredibly delicate role the teacher plays framing literacy pedagogies with students who are at such an important stage in their literacy and language development. How does she engage students in discussion without directing them? All these questions help structure this research.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Rationale

The purpose of this qualitative research was to examine and describe the talk of kindergarten students that emerged from read aloud, guided reading, and literature discussion. Analysis of these literacy events adds to the knowledge base about how young children construct meaning in literacy and how the teacher promotes meaning making. Furthermore, this analysis supports the development of a model depicting the place each event has in a literacy program.

This inquiry followed a group of five kindergarten students as they participated in whole group read aloud, guided reading, and small group literature discussion. Douglas Barnes (1975/1992), a prominent theorist of talk in the classroom, argues that learning is an “interaction between the teacher’s meanings, and those of his pupils, so that what they take away is partly shared and partly unique to each of them” (p. 22). Scrutinizing children’s talk during these literacy events and determining how the teacher cultivates discussions provides a working theory about the nature of this talk and how it demonstrates and influences children’s understandings and development in literacy.

Questions

This study explored the talk of students and teachers as they participated in read aloud, guided reading, and literature discussion. Many teachers understand that literacy pedagogy includes these events, yet they may not fully appreciate how these events support and extend one another, or the role of student and teacher talk in creating

meaning and developing critical thinking. To examine what occurs when children talk about, and engage in analysis of text, this inquiry was guided by the following broad question:

- What is the nature of kindergartener's talk in read aloud, literature discussion, and guided reading?

To answer this question I identified and explored the following sub questions:

1. How does the teacher promote and sustain talk in each event?
2. What are the characteristics of student talk within each event?
3. How do the themes of talk that emerge differ among literacy events?
4. How do the themes of talk in each literacy event provide a window into students' thinking and meaning making?

These questions guided my search for the crucial components of children's talk as they navigated various texts in an early childhood literacy program.

Methodological Framework

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stress the importance of using a research model that best addresses the inquiry's guiding questions. My paradigmatic views guided the research design for this study and led me to borrow from a variety of research traditions and methods. The context for this inquiry was of paramount importance. Therefore, naturalistic inquiry is the model best suited to answer my research questions because it allowed me to study discourse in the natural setting in which it occurred. Naturalistic Inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) is guided by a certain set of axioms, or assumptions: 1) the study takes place in a natural classroom setting; 2) the researcher is the primary instrument for gathering data; 3) data collection is qualitative; 4) purposeful sampling is used for increased scope; 5) implied and propositional knowledge help uncover the

nuances of multiple realities; 6) findings and results are negotiated with participants to provide an accurate depiction of reality; and 7) trustworthiness underscores the research.

I used two qualitative traditions to conceptualize this inquiry. The first qualitative tradition that influenced my design was case study. This study used a “bounded system” (Merriam, 1988). That is, I examined an activity (literacy) and followed five children over a specified amount of time, collecting in-depth data from multiple methods (Creswell, 1998). The case, the talk of these five children as they engaged in various literacy events, was designed for a broad, holistic analysis, leaving room for insights to emerge, which led me to the second research tradition that guided my study: grounded theory. A major portion of my data analysis was an intense scrutiny of student conversations using the coding procedures of grounded theory, including open and axial coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This inquiry identified a theory about young children and literacy pedagogy that emerged from systematic comparative analysis of fieldwork (Patton, 2002).

This inquiry was further influenced by certain ontological, epistemological and methodological stances situated within a constructivist paradigm (Hatch, 2002). This inquiry reflects my ontological perspective, which holds that multiple realities are constructed and that the researcher and participants co-construct the reality the inquiry seeks to uncover. My epistemological stance, the relationship between the known and the knower, holds that there is not one true objective reality to be discovered, and participants are active in the construction of knowledge; participants create their own unique reality. The interactions of the participants were first uncovered and investigated for meaning, and then plumbed, analyzed, and compared.

As the researcher, I am influenced by a constructivist point of view, holding that participants construct their own knowledge and reality based on their individual perspectives and experiences. The findings of this inquiry stem from my analysis as a co-creator of the phenomena. Though I have made extensive provisions for trustworthiness, and have committed myself to accurately and objectively portraying the nature of talk, I am influenced by my perceptions.

Research Design

Context

Stewart Elementary School is a small private laboratory school affiliated with a college located in the Midwest. Stewart Elementary houses two pre-school classrooms, two pre-kindergarten classrooms, two step-ahead classrooms that transition children from pre-school to kindergarten, and a multiage classroom serving kindergarten through fifth grade. At the time this inquiry was conducted, the multiage classroom had 32 students: ten in kindergarten, six in first grade, five in second grade, five in third grade, and six in fourth and fifth grade. I followed a group of five kindergarten students from the multiage classroom during their literacy block. The majority of students in the multiage classroom come from families with middle to upper socioeconomic status. However, the school offers scholarships and financial assistance and values diversity; approximately 25 percent of the children in the multiage classroom received financial assistance at the time of this inquiry. Because admittance is ongoing, this number can vary slightly from the beginning to the end of the year.

As a laboratory school Stewart Elementary is integrally linked to the Education Department at Stewart College and remains one of the last true laboratory settings in the

United States. College faculty and students are common visitors in all the classrooms. Hence, the children who attend Stewart are accustomed daily to seeing college students and faculty in the classroom observing and interacting with small instructional groups. The constructivist philosophy of the education department is mirrored by the classroom teachers. Stewart Elementary, founded in 1925, began as a Nursery School. In 1937, the Child Study Department came into existence and the laboratory school was born. Initially an early childhood center, Stewart Elementary School grew into the constructivist, holistic-based laboratory school community that it is today (Momyer, 1967). Stewart Elementary has a long history of dedication to theory and exemplary teaching practices and encourages teachers in professional development and teaching excellence.

The multiage classroom where my inquiry took place is a busy place, with interactions occurring among students of all ages. The literacy block lasts for an hour and a half. During this time children engage in small focus lessons, independent reading and writing, shared reading and writing, guided reading and writing groups, and literature discussion. Additionally, students use this time to confer and publish. Children work individually, with a partner or in small groups. The small groups are both flexible—based on students’ interests, needs, and learning goals—and dynamic, changing frequently due to teacher assessment of learners.

I observed five students, all ages five and six years old. Often these students were in the same group for guided and shared reading, and when they were not, I followed individual students into specific groups. This allowed me to observe all five students in all literacy events. The participants were kept together in a literature discussion group for

the duration of my inquiry. Although literature discussions occurred in kindergarten and first grade prior to my inquiry, the frequency of this literacy event increased upon my entrance into the classroom. The two classroom teachers involved in this inquiry were both first year teachers who graduated from the Stewart College education department.

Phases of Inquiry

I visited the classroom two times a week for approximately an hour and 45 minutes each session, for twelve weeks. Time on site allowed me to observe and audio tape the participants in read aloud, guided reading, and literature discussion groups.

This twelve-week inquiry can be broken up into successive phases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Phase I of this study, or entry, lasted one week. I had worked in this school in the past, thus I was familiar to the participants. I used this phase to reintroduce myself as a presence during literacy time, to observe the participants, and to take field notes on the routines and structures of the classroom. In addition, I performed the initial semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 1988) of the classroom teachers. Interview questions were designed to gain insight into the teachers' literacy practices and philosophies. The data I gathered in this phase were analyzed as they were collected and then shared with the classroom teacher to compare our initial impressions and to provide a forum for dialogue about the direction of Phase II.

Phase II, or data collection, began when the salient information from Phase I was analyzed, and continued for approximately eleven weeks. As stated previously, this phase consisted of two visits weekly for approximately an hour and forty five minutes during literacy time. Literacy began daily with a whole group read-aloud, which sometimes included a fishbowl discussion, followed by independent work time with

small groups gathering for guided and shared reading, and literature discussion. As a participant observer, I followed the five children from my case as they went from group to group. Each literacy event was tape-recorded and transcribed. I applied open coding to observational field notes taken on a daily basis.

Phase III, ongoing data analysis, began as I approached the end of my inquiry. I analyzed the data, wrote memos (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and continued to meet with the classroom teacher for member checks. Phase III focused mainly on collaborating about the big theories emerging from all collected data. It is important to state here that these three successive phases occurred with fluidity, often weaving in and out.

Participants

The “purposeful sample” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) for this study included five students selected by the classroom teacher. The classroom teacher chose five children with varying levels of reading and language achievements ranging from low to high to best represent the classroom diversity. As a former teacher at this school, I was well known to the students in the multiage classroom; many of the older students were former students of mine. However, the five students chosen for this sample were in kindergarten and knew me only peripherally. The group consisted of three boys and two girls, all ages 5-6. Of the five students, four had attended this school since preschool. One girl moved to the area at the beginning of the academic school year. Two of the boys were bi-racial, with African American or Japanese parents. There were no special needs students in this case.

Data Gathering Procedures and Sources

To build a comprehensive picture of the case and to increase the credibility of the findings, the data collected for this study came from multiple sources. This inquiry used three forms of data collection methods: 1) Participant observation: field and anecdotal notes on students during literacy events, 2) Audio recording: literacy events were taped and transcribed, and 3) Interviews: teachers and students were interviewed to capture their ideas and insights (Appendix E). This data set sources provided multiple lenses to view the whole picture of read-aloud literature discussion. The following table illustrates the data collection method specified for each research question.

Table 1: Data Sources used to Answer Each Research Questions

QUESTION	DATA SOURCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the nature of kindergartener’s talk in read aloud, literature discussion, and guided reading? • How does the teacher promote and sustain talk? • What are the characteristics of student talk within each literacy event? • How do the themes of talk that emerge differ among literacy events? • How do the themes of talk in each literacy event provide a window into students’ thinking and meaning making? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field Notes, Transcripts and Teacher Interviews • Teacher Interviews, Field Notes, Transcripts • Transcripts, Field Notes • Transcripts, Field Notes • Teacher Interviews, Field Notes, Transcripts

The data collection methods provided access to a range of information, allowing the whole picture to emerge. Salient data were identified and analyzed to uncover the phenomena of the nature of talk.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was inductive and ongoing. This intuitive and constant analysis allowed the findings to be more “explicit, recognizable, and accountable” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All forms of data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed—not necessarily in that order—as soon as they were collected. Data analysis tools from the grounded theory and case study traditions were used to discover emerging patterns.

Field notes were taken for the duration of the inquiry (Appendix F). Field notes provided a rich source of information and were intensely scrutinized to maximize data discovery. Directly after each session the notes were reviewed and marked for categorical aggregations—marking anything relevant to identify emergent meanings (Stake, 1995). Additionally, the notes were coded using Corsaro’s (1981) method for marking field notes so that broad themes could be easily identified. This coding occurred daily both during the observation, and after I left the classroom. Each week, I reviewed the initial coding and markings and wrote a memo summarizing and connecting what I was seeing emerge. Memos are “written records of analysis related to the formulation of theory” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 197). I wrote the memos bi-weekly in an attempt to create some distance between the daily data emerging and the broad theories emerging.

Audio tapes were transcribed, separated and grouped into literacy events, then analyzed using coding methods from grounded theory developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). As audio tapes were transcribed daily, open coding—data analysis that records

first impressions and thoughts—identified initial categories and broad themes. These broad themes were checked with my field notes to compare for accuracy. Once an initial set of categories was established, axial coding (charts and diagrams) was applied to look for interconnections between the categories developed from the open coding phase. Axial coding helped visualize the range of connections affecting the identified phenomena. Finally selective coding was applied to help flush out the themes that emerged during open coding, and emerging data was compared to my existing categories. This process allows evolving theories to emerge, and permits saturation to occur, that is, for no new information to present itself.

Interviews were conducted in Phase I and III of this investigation (Appendix E). This data provided insight into the teacher's purposes for and impressions of the literacy events. Once salient portions of the interviews had been transcribed, open coding was employed as previously discussed. After finishing the transcriptions I wrote detailed descriptions that summarized the content of the interviews and recorded overall impressions.

The following table shows the time frame, including successive phases of inquiry and a week by week break down of the when data collection occurred and corresponding methods of analysis. Information about data analysis techniques is also provided. Detailed information about these techniques is provided in the discussion on trustworthiness.

Table 2: Data Collection and Analysis Methods

WEEK	Phase I			Phase II			Phase III →					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
FIELD NOTES												
• <i>Review Notes</i>	X		X		X		X		X		X	
• <i>Corsaro's Coding</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
• <i>Compared Notes to Initial Findings</i>				X		X		X		X		X
AUDIO MATERIAL												
• <i>Transcription</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
• <i>Open Coding</i>					X	X			X	X		X
• <i>Axial Coding</i>									X	X		X
• <i>Selective Coding</i>									X	X		X
• <i>Memo Writing</i>		X		X		X		X		X		X
INTERVIEWS												
• <i>Open Coding</i>	X					X						X
• <i>Written Detailed Description</i>	X					X						X
<u>Additional Data Analysis Techniques</u>												
• <i>Member Check</i>		X					X			X		X
• <i>Expert Debriefing</i>		X		X		X		X		X		X

In-Depth Analysis of Talk

This inquiry endeavored to determine the nature of talk and how talk in literacy can lead to and illustrate deeper understandings for kindergarten students. Therefore, it was necessary to analyze the talk that occurred in each literacy event thoroughly and exhaustively. Initially, I organized the transcripts in groups according to literacy event before coding. For example, I applied open coding to all read-aloud transcripts until saturation. Then, I repeated this process with guided reading transcripts, and then finally

with literature discussion transcripts. Once broad themes and categories had been identified in each literacy event, I created a series of charts that allowed me to ascertain characteristics of the talk in each event. Then, in an effort to make further sense of the emerging characteristics, I applied analysis techniques borrowed from conversation analysis (Heritage, 1984; Silverman, 2001) and discourse analysis (Barnes and Todd, 1977/1995; Gee, 2001; Rogers, 2003) to discover the meanings underlying student talk in all transcripts. Eventually, I chose six transcripts from each literacy event, one transcript every other week, for further analysis. Narrowing transcripts helped tell the story of each literacy event in a more succinct and comprehensible manner. Using different colors for each coding system, I was able to see patterns in the language emerge.

Conversation analysis takes into consideration the structural and sequential organization of talk. Applying conversation analysis aids the researcher in looking for organized patterns of conversation; it examines each statement in the context of the discourse that came before and the discourse that followed (Heritage, 1984). An empirical grounding of analysis is fundamental to conversation analysis; analysis of transcripts is limited to what can be seen. Heritage (1984) explains:

Specifically, analysis is strongly data-driven—developed from phenomena which are in various ways evidenced in the data of interaction. Correspondingly, there is a strong bias against a *priori* speculation about the orientations and motives of the speakers and in favor of a detailed examination of conversationalists' actual actions. Thus the empirical conduct of speakers is treated as the central resource out of which analysis may develop. (p. 243)

Conversation analysis focuses on what is observable and identifiable in the talk transcripts.

Silverman (2001) describes three features of talk with which conversation analysis is particularly concerned. It is his definition of conversation analysis that guided

my work. The first, turn taking and repair, refers to how speakers take turns in relation to previous turns, what the turn accomplishes (question, answer, etc.), and how the turn relates to a subsequent turn. Repair refers to the occasions when speakers speak simultaneously or long silences appear and conversationalists seek to return to acceptable patterns of talk. Next, the notions of conversational openings and adjacency pairs refer to how speakers enter into conversation. This looks at how speakers' initiations prompt a response from another participant. This is most commonly observed in a question/answer sequence known as adjacency pairs. Finally, Silverman (2001) explains that conversational analysis does consider how institutional talk reflects the context of interaction, in my specific research, the school room. However, in conversational analysis the context of the interaction is relevant only so far as it can be identified in the data. In my research, conversational analysis provided a lens with which to view patterns of talk regarding initiation, response and turn taking.

Interestingly, my work with conversational analysis led me directly to discourse analysis. As I noted emerging patterns of turn taking, repair and adjacency pairs, I realized that issues of power and social interaction could not be ignored. Potter (1997) explains discourse analysis as, “[A]n analytic commitment to studying discourses as *text and talk in social practice*...the focus is on language as...the medium for interaction; analysis of discourse becomes, then, analysis of what people do” (p. 146, emphasis in original). Potter (1997) goes on to outline three major assumptions of discourse analysis: 1) DA emphasizes that versions of true and false realities are subjective and seeks to discover how these realities are produced in discourse, 2) DA is mainly concerned with how participants accomplish constructions, and 3) each “text” represents a singular

version of reality, or story, dependent on the participant's construction and the context in which it occurs. In this research, I applied discourse analysis procedures to uncover the conditions and motivations that underpinned the talk in the transcripts; my goal was to view the texts more deeply to gain a comprehensive view of the discourse.

Discourse analysis allows for scrutiny of the subject matter of talk; that is, the content of what is said. To identify content and subject matter, many researchers establish a set of precise categories and then look for how often those categories occur. In this research, I used discourse analysis to condense an abundance of text (the transcripts) into a smaller number of content categories through explicit coding procedures (Stemler, 2001). This kind of analysis can include word and phrase counts; however, I was mainly concerned with identifying and exhausting categories of talk. In chapter four, I define the categories of talk identified in this stage of analysis.

Gee (1999) explains that transcripts analyzed through the lens of discourse analysis looks for situated meanings, cultural models and reflexivity. Gee states, "Situated meanings don't simply reside in individuals' minds; very often they are *negotiated* between people in and through communicative social interaction" (p. 80, emphasis in original). I analyzed the transcripts of teacher and student talk to examine what meanings the group interacted to create. Gee goes on to explain how certain words or phrases can assume cultural models that are "distributed across the different...viewpoints found in the group" (p. 81). The cultural model attached to certain words creates greater meanings and can help organize the thinking of the group. In my research, words and concepts triggered cultural models that extended students' meanings beyond the literal interpretation of the text. Finally Gee explores the concept of

reflexivity which addresses the reciprocity that exists in language and social interaction. He states, “Language simultaneously reflects reality (the way things are) and constructs (construes) it to be a certain way” (p. 82). As I examined my transcripts, my focus shifted between language and context. Discourse analysis looks at the thread of language in the situation where it occurs.

One of the procedures of discourse analysis is to organize the text into stanzas, or “clumps of tone units that deal with a unitary topic or perspective” (Gee, 1999, p. 89). Because of the age of the students involved in this case, the teacher was instrumental in facilitating and organizing conversation about texts. I found that stanzas naturally occurred around the reading of the text in all three literacy events. This helped focus my analysis. Gee further proposes that in analyzing each stanza, the researcher look for six tasks of discourse analysis: 1) semiotic building, the relevant sign systems, systems of knowledge and social languages of the discourse; 2) world building, the associated situated meanings and cultural models; 3) activity building, the larger purpose of the situation and the actions that advance this purpose; 4) socio-culturally, situated identity and relationship building, the roles and identities of the participants and how these are stabilized or transformed; 5) political building, the relevance social goods, or status, power, gender, race, class and identities, of the participants; and 6) connection building, the connections made within and across the interactions. My analysis of the transcripts considered all six of these tasks to varying degrees.

The difference between conversation and discourse analysis can be subject for debate (Wetherall, 1998). These analytical tools are defined in various ways. In this research, the conversational and discourse analysis methods described by Silverman

(2001) and Gee (1999) served as guide for understanding when and why talk occurred, what was said, and the how the situated interaction influenced it all.

As I analyzed transcripts, I cross checked my findings with the coding insights I uncovered from the field notes and interviews. I took my findings to professionals and colleagues in the field for peer and expert debriefings. These debriefings helped me solidify salient categories and findings.

Limitations

As with all research, several methodological limitations must be addressed.

The instrument of choice for data collection in naturalistic inquiry is the human (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). True to my paradigmatic assumptions, I believe that there are a variety of realities to be captured and the human is the only instrument available to encompass the variability. The use of human instrumentation provides limits due to inherent beliefs and biases of the researcher. However, credibility steps were taken to address the value-laden nature of human instrumentation and these steps are addressed in the upcoming section on trustworthiness.

The timeframe of this inquiry allowed me a limited amount of time to conduct my research. There were literacy events that were not captured in my absence. Furthermore, I was not present at the beginning of the year to observe how the foundations of talking about literature were established. The manner in which the teacher introduced the literacy events could have influenced how children in this group were talking about texts.

This inquiry resides within a case study tradition. As such, I followed one group of five children for twelve weeks. The analysis addressed this specific group of children and my findings illustrate the characteristics of talk for these children only.

However, “naturalistic generalizations” (Stake, 1995) and transferability to other sites can be considered.

As a former teacher at Stewart Elementary, I am familiar to the students in the multiage classroom. This is both an asset and a liability to my research. A positive outcome of my familiarity with the school is that I had enough background in this environment to begin data collection immediately. However, I entered into this research site with certain assumptions about what I would see during literacy based on my past experience teaching here. It is always possible that researchers’ biases can color data analysis. Because of this, I frequently interviewed teachers after literacy to gather their insights and I triangulated my data analysis to increase the reliability of my findings.

Stewart Elementary is a private school, and as such, families pay tuition to send their children to this school. In general, this speaks to the economic status of most families and to the importance they place on education. Research has shown the link between socioeconomic status and increased literacy skills.

Ethics

Any research endeavor must rigorously consider the ethics of the study before engaging in the first stage of the design. As researchers we must consider appropriate levels of informed consent, professionalism and issues of accountability. This study was conducted with children ages five and six. This is a vulnerable population and I have taken steps to ensure the complete well being of the participants.

First, I applied for and received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at both my institution and Stewart College. The IRB is responsible for reviewing

all research to ensure the rights and well being of human subjects involved. The IRB has the authority to approve, reject or request amendments to any research. The fact that I received IRB approval from both institutions is indicative of the level of ethical consideration I gave my participants.

Once IRB approval was granted from both institutions, I asked the appropriate gatekeepers for permission to enter the school. I set up a meeting with the principal, the teachers, and college faculty to describe my research; all parties agreed to my entrance into the site (Appendix A). As a laboratory school, parents of children at Stewart Elementary sign a general consent form allowing their child to take place in any classroom research (Appendix B). However, it is my responsibility as the primary researcher to inform the participants, and in this case the parents, about my specific research, the potential risks and benefits. I received informed consent forms from the parents of the children who participated in the inquiry (Appendix C). The informed consents notified the parents of my intent and allowed them to choose whether or not they would like their child to participate. Once this approval was granted, I met with the class and explained that I would be in the classroom listening in during literacy. The children also agreed to my presence.

Confidentiality is of critical importance in this inquiry and was maintained for the duration of the study. Participants were given pseudonyms and these were used when reporting the results of the data to peer and expert debriefers. I stored my data in password protected files and in a locked office to further ensure confidentiality.

The final ethical consideration for discussion concerns my departure from the classroom upon the conclusion of the inquiry. Rather than a quick, abrupt departure, I

phased out of the classroom and made plans with the teacher and the students for follow-up visits. This separation was further minimized by my ongoing relationship with this school.

Provisions for Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness was a primary concern in designing this inquiry and certain provisions were implemented in an effort to increase trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed criteria for consideration in establishing trustworthiness, and I applied these guidelines to this naturalistic design: credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability. The concerns of these criteria and the methods of addressing those concerns were woven throughout the design of this study.

This inquiry was carried out in a manner that increased the probability of the findings being *credible*. Researchers play a large role in determining this credibility. They must sufficiently know the culture they are studying and must be able to establish trust with the participants. To address this I spent Phase I working on developing and renewing existing relationships with participants. My history with this school assured that a high degree of trust was already in place. Furthermore, my background as a teacher in this school gave me insight into the unique culture of a multiage classroom. The use of “persistent observation” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) added depth to my findings. Persistent observation ensured that I constantly labeled the salient information in my data and then thoroughly flushed out every aspect available for consideration, thus presenting a more accurate picture of the phenomena.

Next, I triangulated my data sources (Denzin, 1970). Triangulation decreases the possibility of researcher bias influencing the findings because data is being confirmed by

multiple data sources. I triangulated my methods of analysis by comparing the data from interviews, transcripts of student discussions and coded field notes. Furthermore, the use of a “member check”, a term used by Robert Stake (1995) was instituted. Periodically, after the literacy block was concluded, I asked the teacher what she thought about the discussions. Her comments were transcribed and added to the data collection. As I collected field notes, I coded the salient data. These, too, were periodically brought in to the teachers for additional member checking. Because I am familiar with this setting, I had to consider that I might overlook something, or have certain expectations concerning what I might see. Triangulating data from more than one source increases the credibility of the findings.

Finally, I reported my findings to peers in my field, not involved with the study. These peers included fellow doctoral candidates in literacy, teachers with whom I worked, and professionals at conference presentations. Peer debriefing provides an outside lens in which to examine the emerging data. I described what I was seeing, and peers asked me probing questions designed to clarify the results, and push me to think further. Furthermore, I met weekly with my advisor who served as an expert debriefer; these meetings challenged me to think about my data in more depth.

Transferability is another component of trustworthiness. This is the idea that the data that are collected are representative of that event. To establish a solid data base, I used “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) to describe my findings. I collected a wide tapestry of data including data that addressed the dynamics of the classroom, structures in place, background of students, teacher philosophy and practice, and the talk occurring during the three literacy events. I strove to capture the whole experience—to create a

comprehensive picture of the literacy events, thus allowing others to make transferability judgments based on their own experience.

The measures described above further served to establish dependability.

Dependability is concerned with seeking “means for taking into account both factors of instability and factors of phenomenal or design induced change” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 299). I overlapped my data sources and strove for systematicity of my observations and data. Next, I engaged the members involved in the inquiry in interrator reliability of emerging codes. Finally, triangulation (Denzin, 1970), thick description and peer debriefing further address the concerns of establishing dependability.

Halpren (1983) is credited with the creating the “audit trail”, crucial for establishing confirmability. This is a technique where the researcher makes the raw data—notes, transcriptions, interviews, audio-visual materials, memoing, etc—available for audit by another individual (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to make my study confirmable I left a detailed audit trail. Again, many of the methods used to make my study credible apply here as well including, triangulation, peer debriefing, systematicity, member check, and interrator reliability.

The chart below addresses the criteria for trustworthiness, the concerns such criteria generates, and the methods I took to specifically address it in this research. This chart was adapted from a similar organization tool included in the dissertation of Dr. Elizabeth Baker (1995).

Table 3: Trustworthiness Concerns and Methods

CRITERIA	MAIN CONCERNS	METHODS
Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn culture • Build trust • Find anomalies • Identify salient elements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prolonged periods of engagement • Peer debriefing • Triangulation • Member check
Transferability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a contextual reference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thick description
Dependability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methodological shifts • Redundancy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overlap data methods • Systematicity • Interrator reliability • Analysis of researcher's role
Confirmability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can the data be confirmed by an outsider? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit trail • Triangulation • Member check

Please refer to the former discussion for definition of the terms in the chart.

Summary

I followed a group of five kindergarten students over twelve weeks as they engaged in three literacy events: read aloud, guided reading, and literature discussion groups. This research was situated within a constructivist paradigm of inquiry, which maintains that absolute realities are unknowable. In keeping with the constructivist paradigm, naturalistic methods of data collection were employed, including audio recordings of student talk, field notes, and interviews with students and teachers. All data collected were transcribed, coded and analyzed. Field notes, taken daily, provided an abundant source of information and were examined using Corsaro's (1981) method for coding broad themes. Transcriptions of interviews and audio recordings of each literacy event were analyzed using methods from grounded theory including open coding, axial

coding and selective coding. Constant comparative methods were used to compare emerging data to existing categories until saturation occurred and no new information presents itself. Conversation and discourse analysis procedures offered an in-depth analysis of talk that included looking for patterns of turn taking and the social context in which the talk occurred. Finally, provisions for trustworthiness were carefully considered including credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This inquiry was guided by the broad question: What is the nature of kindergarteners' talk in read aloud, guided reading, and literature discussion? To fully answer this question I had to identify and explore the following sub questions: How does the teacher promote and sustain talk? What are the characteristics of student talk within each literacy event? How do the themes of talk that emerge differ among literacy events? How do the themes of talk in each event provide a window into students' thinking and meaning making?

To narrate the story of this inquiry, I begin by describing the context of the study including the setting, the teachers, the students, and the literacy curriculum. Next, I examine each literacy event in terms of protocol, the teacher's role in promoting and sustaining the talk during the event, and the characteristics of student talk. Finally, I explain the themes that emerged in all three literacy events, their similarities and differences, and how the events provide a window into students' thinking and meaning making in regards to reading.

Context

To understand the nature of students' talk during read aloud, guided reading, and literature discussion groups, it is necessary to describe both the classroom where the discussions occurred and the participants involved. This context provides a framework with which to view what occurred during the literacy events by examining 1) the

multiage environment; 2) the two teachers' educational background and philosophy; 3) the five participants; and 4) the literacy curriculum and pedagogy.

The Multiage Environment

Stewart Elementary, a private laboratory school in the Midwest, is comprised of two preschool classrooms, two pre-kindergarten classrooms, two step-ahead classrooms, and one multiage classroom. The multiage classroom contains kindergarten through fifth grade aged students, and it is here that my inquiry took place. At the time of this study, there were 32 students in the multiage classroom, though my focus was centered on kindergarteners who were emerging readers, not completely independent. There were 11 kindergarten students, and I frequently observed all 11 students in various literacy events. However, I narrowed my focus to one case study of five students selected by the classroom teachers, Regina and Becky. These five students represented a wide range of literacy and language skills from low to high. My case centered on Ben, Joe, Michael, Ali and Kendra.

Multiage instruction is guided by the premise that instruction is maximized when children are grouped by interest, needs and ability rather than by age. Katz (1995) explains the benefits of multiage learning:

[T]he wider the age span in a group, the wider the range of behavior and performance likely to be accepted and tolerated by the adults as well as by the children themselves. In a mixed-age group, a teacher is more likely to address differences, not only between children but within each individual child. In a mixed-age group, it is acceptable for a child to be ahead of his or her same-age peers in math, for example, but behind them in reading, or social competence, or vice versa. (n. pag.)

At Stewart Elementary, the multiage philosophy outlined by Katz is embraced. Students are grouped based on next learning steps as identified through rigorous assessment and

evaluation. It is not uncommon to see an instructional group comprised of three or more typical “grades”. On the other hand, single aged grouping is not avoided if the needs of the children dictate it. In this inquiry, I observed whole class read alouds, two guided reading groups with kindergarten and first grade aged children, and literature discussion groups of kindergarten aged children only. In each literacy event observed, I focused only on the five kindergarten case study students. Because of the multiage environment these students were exposed to the literacy language and behaviors of older students every day. Teachers have higher expectations of kindergarten students because they are not restricted by the confines of what typical students can do in a single grade classroom. This context affects the language and literacy behaviors of these kindergartners.

Stewart Elementary is a laboratory school. Lab schools are child study or education centers associated with an education department in a college or university. Lab schools educate children, while providing on-site education for pre-service teachers as well. Kochan (1997) delineates common characteristics of lab schools: a focus on children, development, and learning; competent and reflective teachers; responsive instructional leadership; a caring learning environment; curricular and assessment strategies that are current, appropriate, and effective; and a connection between theory and practice mirrored by the college coursework.

College students are in the multiage classroom on a daily basis. As freshmen and sophomores in the education department, college students are largely observing children and teachers and analyzing learning, pedagogy, and teacher strategies. Occasionally these college students work one-on-one with a multiage child, or teach a single lesson to a small group. As juniors and seniors, college students are in the classroom for extended

practicum placements, teaching entire curricular units to both small and large groups of children. Because of this lab environment, the classroom teachers at Stewart Elementary are held accountable for providing best-practice classroom environments with a focus on implementing practice based on the most current constructivist educational theory. Students in the multiage classroom benefit from this academic rigor.

The Teachers

The environment of Stewart Children's School calls for team teaching. The teachers here have a commitment to collaboration in designing and implementing curriculum. At the time of this inquiry, there were three full time teachers in the multiage classroom. My case involved two of the team: Regina and Becky. Each teacher in the multiage classroom had a contact group of ten to eleven students for maximum organization and record keeping, though all teachers work with all children. Though Regina was the contact teacher for the youngest children, the five kindergarten students I followed were in instructional groups most often led by both Regina and Becky.

Regina

Regina was a first year teacher at the time of this study. Her student teaching placement was in the multiage classroom and she graduated from the education department at Stewart College. Thus she was highly familiar with the instruction, needs and pace associated with multiage learning. As a recent graduate, Regina articulates a clear theoretical framework for teaching and learning, as well as literacy practice, and this framework is reflected in her classroom practice.

Regina explains that her literacy practice is influenced by whole language theory. She explains:

I believe we need to have a whole language approach, meaning that we expose our students to quality literature, get them excited to read whole books, writing with purpose, or for a purpose, I guess. Learning about the sharing of writing...that it is for conveying information and feelings. I think we need to be reading lots of books to students, with them and taking them through with guidance. Also though, having them discuss to extend comprehension through talk. That is where lit discussion and book clubs come in. In discussing what literature means, they evaluate it, look at craft. (2005)

Regina clearly articulates her belief that children need to engage in stimulating literacy and language experiences that include reading, writing, listening and speaking. She states that children need to be read to, that they need to read independently and that they need to have guidance through texts as well. This belief is reflected in her literacy pedagogy in the form of read aloud, guided reading and literature discussion groups.

Creating meaningful experiences for children's talk is important to Regina. She maintains:

I think talk is important because without discussion it is hard for them [students] to process their thoughts, because they can talk faster than they can write. Talk shows us their first impressions. It's the first indicator of their thinking. And then they can bounce ideas off of each other. Talk is the most natural process of thinking and extending. (2005)

Regina understands that when students talk, teachers are given a window into their thinking and meaning-making processes. Because of this, Regina creates room in her classroom for students to talk. Students in this setting are comfortable sharing their ideas.

Becky

Becky, like Regina, is also a graduate of Stewart College. She has one more semester of teaching experience than Regina, recruited to the multiage team in January of the previous year. Becky's certification is in early childhood, and most of her instructional groups are with kindergarten through second grade aged students. Becky

also has a name for the theoretical framework that guides her, though she is less expansive than Regina. She states, “I am guided by whole language for literacy instruction. That students learn to read and write by reading and writing. By experiencing it” (2005). This succinct statement is followed by the explanation that students “experience” literacy through read aloud, independent reading and writing, focus lessons in writing and reading strategies, conferencing with peers and teachers, and literature discussion groups. The pedagogy that Becky implements mirrors her articulated stance.

Becky is passionate about the students she teaches. She exclaims, “They teach me every day how much they can do. They impress me every day. The way they use language, the way they talk about books, and their writing. They don’t have fear. They take risks” (2005). Becky views her understanding of teaching and learning as an evolutionary process. She describes her constant desire to learn more about teaching her students:

I am still learning how to talk to students and pull their ideas out of them. I feel like I am still learning how to identify next learning steps in literacy and I am always working on individualizing literacy instruction.

This comment illustrates Becky’s belief that she needs to observe her students to determine where they are and what their next instructional steps might be—that students have valuable information to share. Becky’s dedication to the teaching and learning process is unwavering.

Becky believes that the literacy program in the multiage classroom is ideal for maximizing student success. She explains:

I feel like our literacy is important because our students can actually be successful. It is open and they have a lot of free choice, but they are still being

guided by the teachers and what we think they need. We have focus lessons which can be pulled from their writing and reading and conferences and assessments, but also, especially with the younger kids, we present new information like, for example, genre studies. Things we think it is time they be introduced to. (2005)

This comment exemplifies the balance between independent and guided practice that the literacy program seeks to implement.

The Participants

The five students involved in this case are all of kindergarten age. A brief description of each child is provided in the following section in order to help offer a more complete picture of the case.

Ben

At the time of this inquiry Ben was five years old. Ben is a quiet boy in large group situations, but opens up greatly in small group experiences. Born to an American father and a Japanese-American mother, Ben has short black hair and dark, intense eyes. In social situations, Ben is outgoing and friendly and commands a great deal of respect from his peers. When Ben speaks, others stop to listen. His ideas and insights during the observed literacy events provided rich fodder for students' further thinking. He liked small group literature discussion groups more than any other literacy activity. Ben is considered by his teachers to be high in both reading and oral language expression.

Joe

Joe, a five year old boy, can easily be described as the comedian of the group. Joe likes to make his peers laugh, sometimes leading the group off the given topic in order to deliver a joke. Yet Joe can be an intent listener, opening up about his personal life experiences and in the process, inviting others to do so as well. Joe's mother is

Caucasian and his father, African American—a subject that Joe brought up on more than one occasion. Though sometimes fidgety and a little silly in small group literacy events, he continued to follow the discussion and had a great deal to say. His teachers consider Joe to be high in reading and intermediate in language development.

Michael

Michael is a blond, blue-eyed boy. He turned six during the course of this inquiry. At times, Michael is overpowered by his peers in small discussion groups. Though he appears to follow along closely, it takes him longer to formulate his thoughts and verbalize them, thus he is often skipped over. When he does comment, his comments are often just slightly off, leading the group into a new direction, or halting the conversation altogether. Michael often began his comments by announcing, “I have something to say”, as if he needed the time to prepare himself. Furthermore, Michael was always the one to draw the teacher’s attention to interruption if it occurred during small group learning times. Michael has a cheerful disposition; however, he is frequently quiet and reserved. Michael is considered by his teachers to be average in reading, and low in oral language expression.

Ali

Ali, one of two girls in this case study, was five years old when this inquiry took place. She has long blond hair, and bright blue eyes. She is outgoing in academic settings and contributed frequently to the small group dialogue in all literacy events. Yet in social situations, Ali commonly sits back and observes those around her. She is not ostracized for her reticence; rather, her peers seem to embrace this quality in her. Ali can be incredibly insightful and mature for her age, and when she has something to say, her

classmates stop and listen. Though she speaks with a light lisp, it does not deter her from sharing her ideas. Becky and Regina consider Ali to be extremely high in both reading and oral language expression.

Kendra

Kendra is the most outgoing and gregarious of the case study students. Kendra was six at the time this inquiry began. She has long brown hair, and hazel eyes. She loves to sing and dance and perform in front of her class (she often acts out her stories in dramatic interpretation). This love of performing carries over into academic situations. Kendra is often the first to question or comment in small groups, and of all the students, her comments tended to be the longest and most developed. Her tendency for lengthy speech often sends her into tangents that lead the conversation away from the topic. Kendra loves to laugh, and looks for the humor in books. Kendra is considered to be low to average in reading and high in oral language expression by the classroom teachers.

Literacy Curriculum and Pedagogy

In accordance with Stewart Elementary School's stated philosophy, the literacy block in the multiage classroom draws from the constructivist theory. Constructivism holds that students construct knowledge individually based on experiences and social interactions (Singer & Revenson, 1996). Learning occurs through the process of assimilation and accommodation. In the multiage classroom, teachers apply holistic practice in order to meet the needs of individual learners and to provide rich experiences that support learners' active construction of language and literacy knowledge.

Both Regina and Becky name Whole Language as the philosophy that underpins their practice. Dorothy Watson (1989) states, "Whole language is not a program,

package, set of materials, method, practice, or technique; rather, it is a perspective on language and learning that *leads to the acceptance* of certain strategies, methods, materials, and techniques” (p. 131). The literacy curriculum in the multiage classroom is guided by whole language in that the beliefs and perspectives of these teachers directly affect the pedagogy they apply to literacy instruction.

The literacy curriculum is guided by the following tenets of constructivism and whole language: 1) an acceptance of learners where they are, 2) flexibility within the literacy pedagogy structure that accommodates students’ individual rates of progress, 3) supportive classroom community that nudges learners to deeper levels of thinking, 4) high expectations for learners as they engage in authentic reading, writing, and learning through literacy events, 5) skills and strategies taught in the context of real reading and writing experiences, 6) teacher support through scaffolding and collaboration, and 7) informal and formal assessment that emphasizes individuals’ growth as well as their accomplishments (Teacher Interviews, 2005).

Literacy instruction is set up as a 90 minute block of time where the philosophy described above can be implemented without interruption. The literacy block in the multiage classroom is a lively time, with students moving freely about for supplies and books and conversing with each other and teachers. Within this literacy block students are engaged in reading and writing experiences, both independently and with guided practice. For this inquiry, I chose to examine three literacy events—read aloud, guided reading, and literature discussion groups—in an effort to uncover the literacy meanings students create in each event as evidenced by their discussions and interactions.

Literacy Events

Six transcripts from each literacy event were chosen to tell the story of the event. Every two weeks I selected one transcript from read aloud, guided reading, and literature discussion. These transcripts represented the most typical example of the literacy event for that week. For clarification, when I refer to read aloud transcripts I will label each transcript as RA Transcript 1-6; guided reading transcripts will be labeled as GR Transcript 1-6; literature discussion transcripts referred to as LD Transcript 1-6. The following sections describe my analysis of 18 transcripts, 6 in each area (see Appendix G for a list of texts).

Read Aloud

Read aloud is a literacy staple in this classroom. In order to uncover what occurred during the daily read aloud for both students and teachers I describe this event in terms of 1) protocol; 2) the teacher's role in promoting and sustaining the talk during the literacy event; 3) the characteristics of student talk; and 4) a summary of the literacy event. Because read aloud occurred as a whole group event, transcript segments often contain talk of students other than the five kindergartners included in my case. When this happens, rather than use names, I will identify the speaker as 'student'. It is important to include all comments to retain the integrity of the conversation.

1) Read Aloud Protocol

The children arrive at the multiage classroom between 8:15 and 8:30 in the morning. Upon arrival, students put away belongings in their cubbies and browse books until the teacher calls them over to the "Knotty Pine" room for morning meeting. Morning meeting consists of announcements, a glance at the schedule for the day, and the

daily read-aloud. Students are seated in a circle and the teacher is in a rocking chair towards the front of the room. I noted this set up in my field notes from February 28, 2005:

Children enter the meeting room and gather in a circle for read aloud. Due to the number of children, this puts some of them quite far from the book. The teacher's place becomes the head of the group...

During this morning read aloud time, students of all ages participate.

Teachers carefully consider what texts to choose for morning read aloud. When asked about her book choice for read aloud, Regina explained:

For read aloud, if there is something going on that particular day that it might relate to, a holiday, a field trip, then I might try to pull something related to that. Sometimes we are studying an author, or a genre and I will stick within those guidelines. Sometimes it is a brand new book that has come in and I will read that, and get excited about new literature. I choose books for morning read aloud usually to go along with what we are doing in content area. But sometimes they are books that kids request, sometimes they are new books, or just something that catches my eye. It can really be anything. (2005)

My observations confirm this statement. When I arrived in the multiage classroom, students were discussing Black History month, and so the texts reflected that topic. For example, read aloud texts included *Remember: The Journey to School Integration* (2004), by Toni Morrison and *The Story of Ruby Bridges* (1995), by Robert Coles. Subsequent read aloud texts ranged from poetry to non-fiction to fantasy and folktales.

Whether it is Regina or Becky reading, the protocol for read aloud is the same. The teacher begins by reading the title and showing students the front cover. Sometimes this will elicit no response from the students. For example, Transcript 1 shows that the Becky begins the read aloud by saying, "Today we are going to read Toni Morrison's *Remember: The Journey to School Integration*". This introduction is followed by some

low background chatter and then she launches directly into the reading. Further evidence of the read aloud structure can be found in my field notes when I observed the following:

The talk allowed in read aloud happens during the reading. Very little happens before or after the reading. This appears to be mostly to sustain meaning which would support teacher intent for the event. (2005)

It is not uncommon for the teacher to simply state the title and begin the reading, indicating to students by her lack of questioning that this is not the time for discussion.

Following the introduction of the text, the teacher reads for a time and then occasionally stops to ask a question or allow for conversation. I call these conversations that are embedded in the text “mini-conversations” due to the brief nature of the exchanges. For the remainder of the read aloud, students occasionally volunteer a comment or ask a question; however, when brief spurts of conversation occur it is usually because the teacher stops to ask a question or allows a pause for student comments. While thinking about text is always encouraged, there are times during the read aloud when it is more acceptable to discuss the text than others. These times are usually indicated by a teacher seeking a response. This will be addressed further when examining the teacher’s role and the characteristics of student talk.

Typically, there is little conversation at the conclusion of the read aloud. The teacher may make one closing comment such as Regina did when she finished reading *The Paper Boy*, (1996) by Dav Pilkey. Students were visiting the Tribune that day for a field trip, further evidence that the read aloud text reflects daily activities, and Regina concluded read aloud in RA Transcript 2, the following way:

Regina: So today, when you go to the Tribune, maybe you can ask them about who delivers their papers, and how that works. How long do you think it takes to deliver papers?

Student: My friend is a paper boy and he says it usually takes him an hour and thirty minutes.

Student: Depends on how long the route is.

Regina: We'll see....

This type of closing comment by the teacher is intended to provide some closure for the read aloud session. Regina is quick to end the conversation with a "We'll see" comment. She does not extend the talk further. There is only one instance of a more extended closing conversation in the six transcripts chosen. In RA Transcript 3, Ali asks a question at the end of reading *Flossie and the Fox* (1986), by Patricia McKissack, that sets off a brief closing conversation.

Teacher: Ali?

Ali: What was she [Flossie] really trying to do?

Teacher: I don't know...What was she trying to do? Lauren?

Student: She was trying to keep the fox away from the eggs.

Michael: Yeah, or else the fox would have stolen all the eggs.

Teacher: Yes? (to student with a raised hand)

Student: She probably knew the first time she saw the fox, but she just kept saying, "well you know, you are not really a fox" to make him think of something else.

Teacher: So in the end did she trick him?

All: Yes!

Teacher: Was she trying to get him caught, or was she trying to protect her eggs?

A few together: Protect the eggs...

Student: Both!

Many: Yes, both...

Teacher: Yes. Interesting.

This closing conversation is important because it revealed students' comprehension, and clarified the meaning of the book for students. The main purpose of the read aloud is to ensure that students comprehend and thus enjoy texts of various styles and genres. If there are no clarifications requested by students, the teacher's wrap up of the book is extremely brief.

2) *The Teacher's Role*

The teacher controls the read aloud session. In read aloud the teacher reads a text out loud to the students. This affords her control of when talk will occur and to a certain extent, what the talk will focus on. While observing read aloud, I made the following note in my field journal:

Kids raise their hands because of the whole group format. Teacher pauses slightly when it is appropriate to talk, or asks the first question. This makes her the director of the session. (2005)

The teacher has the primary responsibility for the direction of read aloud—she models pacing, fluency and expression; the students are attentive observers. For whole group read aloud in the multiage classroom, the teachers have stated in their interviews that modeling, comprehension, and sharing enjoyment are the primary goals. The way these teachers initiate and respond to students' conversation determines how students engage in and think about texts.

Teachers were the main initiators of discussion in read aloud. The introduction of the text is often where a teacher will first initiate talk. Students are quick to respond to this initiation. RA Transcript 2 illustrates this:

Regina: It is time for read aloud. This morning we are going to read *Flossie and the Fox* by Patricia M. McKissack and illustrations by Rachel Isadora.

Kendra: Ooh, I love the name Rachel Isadora.

Student: Like our teacher, Ms. Rachel.

Regina: This is a different Rachel, isn't it?

Kendra: We read another book by this author.

Regina: What book did we read by this author?

Kendra: *Christmas in the Big House*.

Regina: Yes, that is the same author. That is a nice observation.

The key purpose of introducing the read aloud isn't to establish background for the students. The teachers simply introduce the text, and if students make connections or have comments, they are welcome to share them. Rarely does the teacher actively seek to help scaffold students in making connections at the onset of the reading. And if teachers do ask any questions to elicit response, the conversation tends to be very brief. For example, RA Transcript 6 from *The Day of Ahmed's Secret* (1995), by Florence Perry Heide, shows that Regina begins the following way:

Regina: Today we are going to read *The Day of Ahmed's Secret*. Can you tell where this story takes place by looking at the illustration on the cover?

Student: The way the people dress make it look like the people are from the middle east.

Regina: Then what might this story be about?

Ben: I don't know, probably about his family.

After this brief exchange Regina begins reading. She is reinforcing that this is not the time or place for extended conversation. By posing the question, students are encouraged

to think about the answer in their heads without being given the opportunity to voice those thoughts.

In read aloud, the teacher guides the conversation through initiation, most commonly in the form of questioning. As outlined in the protocol, the teacher determines how long students will have to comment and she controls the pacing by implementing a hand raising policy. She asks a mixture of open and closed ended questions, furthering her position of control. Open-ended questions usually occur at the beginning of the read aloud session. The following questions all occurred during the beginning (or early part) of the read aloud session:

“What’s happening over here [in this illustration]?” (Transcript #1)

“Is there anything you know about Flossie already?” (Transcript #2)

“Are there really such things as paper boys? Is this a real job” (Transcript #3)

“What do you think this [story] is about, then?” (Transcript #5)

“Can you tell where this story takes place by looking at the illustration on the cover?” (Transcript #6)

These questions were likely posed to activate students’ thinking, not necessarily to get them talking. Open questions were more frequently positioned at the end of the text, as a check for comprehension. The following questions, asked by the teacher, came at the end of the read aloud session:

“What was [Flossie] trying to do?” (Transcript #2)

“Why is Jenny so fascinated by the penny?” (Transcript #5)

Open-ended questions are not commonly asked during the actual reading of the text because the task is for students to be listen to the story.

During the reading, it is more likely that the teacher will ask closed-ended questions that elicit a brief response from students. These responses are often evaluated by the teacher. The following interaction took place during the read aloud of *The Wise Woman and her Secret* (1991), by Eve Merriam, from RA Transcript 5.

Teacher: Why are they in such a hurry?

Student: To get the wisdom?

Teacher: Why are they in such a hurry to get wisdom?

Student: To be really smart and to learn better.

And then later in the same conversation:

Teacher: What does she want them to do?

Student: She wants them to find out for themselves.

Teacher: How can they find out for themselves?

Ben: By looking around.

Through her questioning, the teacher is in the position to elicit and control students' talk. The kind of questions she asks, and the way that she asks them, puts her in control of the conversation, and encourages brief, short answers from her students. She is interested in comprehension, but it is a quick surface level check.

Teachers' response to students' comments and questions often includes an evaluation. Teachers often evaluate the comments and/or questions posed by students. This evaluation follows an IRE format: initiation, response and evaluation (Mehan, 1979). Sometimes this evaluation is obvious when the teacher responds with a "good" or "yes" or "no" comment. Sometimes the evaluation is more subtle, done when she

responds back with another question, or simply moves on to reading. In RA Transcript 1, we see how the teacher evaluates a student:

Student: The pictures are in black and white. I mean brown and white.

Teacher: Yes, they are.

The teacher could have let that comment hang, however she chooses to offer an evaluation in the form of affirmation. And in RA Transcript 2:

Teacher: But how would you know what a fox looks like if you've never seen a fox?

Michael: Yeah, if she's never seen one before, if she's never seen that kind of animal?

Student: If she'd seen a rabbit then she would know what a rabbit looked like. And that doesn't look like a rabbit, so she'd at least know it wasn't a rabbit.

Teacher: Good point.

Michael reiterates his question showing he has similar concerns, and then another student offers a possible solution. The teacher evaluates his suggestion. And from RA Transcript 3:

Teacher: Are papers always delivered on a bicycle? (all: No) How else?

Many: Cars...

Student: Sometimes they are sold.

Ali: We have a paper not far from our house, so sometimes we just walk. And sometimes there are paper girls.

Teacher: Yes, sometimes it is a girl isn't it?

(Teacher reads...)

Ali brings up an important point about paper delivery people. The teacher chooses not pursue this topic and ends the thread by offering an evaluation in the form of

a hypothetical question and then begins reading. The previous three transcript excerpts show examples of how the teacher directly evaluates student response.

Additionally, the teacher is usually the only member of the literacy event to answer questions posed by students. If she doesn't answer herself, she directs someone else to answer, remaining in control of turn taking. An earlier transcript revealed the teachers' comment, "I don't know...What was she trying to do?" Following this statement, the teacher directed another student to answer. When kindergarten students question in whole group read aloud it is usually to ask questions to clarify plot, the content of the illustrations, or to ask the meaning of a specific word. The teacher provides the answers. The following conversation turns show the kind of questions young students ask, and how the teacher answered them:

Ben: What does that say? (pointing to illustration)

Teacher: It says 'Daniel Colored Public School. (Transcript 1)

Another example:

Kendra: What does 'critter' mean?

Teacher: It is a kind of animal (Transcript #2)

And after the teacher read "And by the way, if that hound's looking, it's all over for you", one kindergarten student asked:

Student: What is? What's all over?

Teacher: What's all over? Student? (Transcript #2)

Even if the teacher does not answer the question herself, she is still in control of seeing that the question answered. This is a common technique that these teachers used in read aloud.

The teacher is the knower in read aloud. Peter Johnston (2004) uses the term *knower* to describe a person who is in the position to answer questions and make comments; the person in a position of power. The nature of teacher talk during read aloud reflects the teachers' beliefs that read aloud is for listening and enjoyment first, and comprehension as a benefit. Teachers control the conversation by situating themselves in the front of the circle, by asking students to raise hands, and by being the main talk initiator, questioner and respondent to questions asked by students. On average, open-ended questions designed to elicit a deeper response from students were initiated by the teacher 1-3 times during a reading. They use this kind of questioning as a spot check for comprehension and it allows students to contribute. Otherwise, the teacher establishes herself as the main knower in read aloud.

3) Characteristics of Student Talk

Analysis of student talk during read aloud illustrates emerging patterns of when students initiate talk, when they respond, when they question, and the content of what they talk about.

In read aloud, students are essentially participants; their main role is that of respondents. As outlined above, the teacher remains in control of read aloud session, relegating students to the role of participants. Students answer questions when asked by a teacher, however, answers are usually brief, not interrupting the forward pacing of the read aloud. The following excerpts from *The Paper Boy*, RA Transcript 2 illustrate this:

Teacher: What would happen if the paper boy just slept in because his bed was too comfortable?

Student: There wouldn't be a paper when people woke up.

Teacher: People wouldn't get their news would they?

(Teacher reads...)

And later:

Teacher: How do you think the papers get to the paper boy's house?

Student: Probably those people would take them.

Kendra: Probably the Tribune.

Teacher: So people might deliver them?

Student: In the beginning in the first picture, it has a truck in it.

Teacher: Good observation. Look here. On the first page, where there are no words it has a picture of a man getting out of the truck with a load of papers. And then what does the boy have to do to get them ready?

Student: Fold them up.

Teacher: Yes.

Students answer questions when they are prompted by the teacher. Answers are on point and quite succinct. The teacher starts this thread with her question about how the newspapers get to the boy's house. All the following student responses stem from that initiation. When a student suggests that the first picture has a truck on it, the teacher evaluates that response and acknowledges that the papers are delivered to the boy by the truck. The teacher here again demonstrates control of the conversation by posing questions and offering an evaluation to end the conversation thread.

Students talk is closely tied to the text. In read aloud students refrain from wide diversions or tangents. Students talk in response to teacher questions which address the plot or meaning of the text. And when kindergarten students initiate talk in read aloud, it is most often in the form of a question to clarify plot, illustrations or vocabulary, still focused on the text. Students' comments are rarely generative in read aloud; most

comments address illustration. Illustrations are generally safer for students to access, because they have more experience reading illustration for meaning. Commonly asked questions by kindergarten students are such as “What does that mean?” and “What is that a picture of?” This demonstrates students’ understanding that it is important to understand the story, even though this may not be a time to participate in deep discussion.

In the six read aloud transcripts that I analyzed, kindergarteners occasionally offered comments or insights without being prompted, but usually it was older students who did this. The following excerpt from RA Transcript 2, *The Paper Boy* shows an example when a kindergarten student generated a connection:

Teacher: Kendra?

Kendra: On that last page, that is the same picture as the cover. But the boy here is smaller than he is on the cover.

Teacher: Yeah, the cover is like a close-up.

Brief moments of student generated comments can be seen in all six transcripts, though on average only offered by a kindergarten student 1-2 times per read aloud session.

4) Read Aloud Summary

Read aloud always precedes the literacy block, serving as a type of warm up for students’ thinking. The raised hand protocol conveys to students that this event is not the time for open-ended discussion, or extensive comments, connections or sharing. Though students do occasionally offer that kind of talk, it is more uncommon. Teachers remain in control of the conversation physically holding the text, beginning and pausing the reading, and by asking questions and initiating comments. The majority of questions asked are closed-ended. Additionally, the teacher remains in control by being the knower;

the one who responds to student comments and the one who answers student questions. The actual act of reading further serves a tool to manage conversation. When the teacher deems a conversation over, she simply starts reading. Since read aloud is not the time for extended conversation about text, she begins reading to move the event along and to cut conversation threads short. For students, read aloud is typically a time to listen, enjoy, and understand a book without verbalizing thinking. The beginning of read aloud offers students a chance to make connections, and the conclusion offers opportunities to ensure that basic comprehension was achieved. Students can ask questions, and young students most frequently asked questions about illustrations during this event. However, students understand that this is not an extended reading experience, and keep questions and comments to a minimum.

Guided Reading

Guided reading allows teachers to work with a small group of students on a similar reading level to help them learn effective skills and strategies for decoding text. Fountas and Pinnell (2002) explain that guided reading is an “approach designed to help individual students learn how to process a variety of increasingly challenging texts with understanding and fluency” (p. 193). In the multiage classroom where my inquiry was conducted, the literacy block immediately followed morning read aloud. During this block of time, the teachers worked with small guided reading instructional groups. For guided reading, teachers grouped students according to the “interests and developmental needs” of the students.

In order to examine what occurred during small guided reading instructional groups for both students and teachers, I describe this event in terms of 1) protocol; 2) the

teacher's role in promoting and sustaining the talk during the literacy event; 3) the characteristics of student talk; and 4) a summary of the literacy event. Each of my five case study students belonged to two different groups, one traditional guided reading group and the other a guided reading group that had more teacher voice support than is typically offered. These two groups were comprised exclusively of kindergarten students, and included students not identified in my study. The guided reading transcript segments included in this section occasionally contain comments from children outside of my case identified as 'student'.

1) Guided Reading Protocol

Guided reading occurred during the daily 90 minute block of literacy instruction. During that block, each teacher in the multiage classroom had 45 minutes to meet with two or three small groups for specific literacy instruction while the rest of the children worked independently. During their respective 45 minute instructional times, Regina and Becky each worked with two guided reading groups. I only observed the groups necessary to view my five case study students engaged in guided reading.

The texts for guided reading in this classroom were leveled according to a system first developed by the New Zealand Ministry of Education. The leveling system spans from kindergarten to second grade and holds books classified in stages of emergent, early, and fluent texts. Richard Owens Publishing Company has adopted this leveling system, titled "Books for Young Learners" (BYL). Margaret Mooney (2003) explains this system:

Each BYL book carries a nine-step leveling bar printed on the back cover identifying suggested approaches (Shared, Guided, and Independent) to use with primary readers at different stages of reading development. This leveling system emphasizes the flexibility of reading instructional materials, and does not suggest

that teachers should use the book in any specific order, or that students must experience all three approaches with all titles. (<http://www.rcowen.com/CB-ResourcebyGrade.htm>)

The leveling system is important in guided reading. Regina explains:

Guided reading books are on a leveled system in our class. I am trying to move kids through the levels. I choose texts that are just harder than the last time we read. I also try to choose books that are suited to a specific reading strategy or teaching point that I have noted the kids need in order to be better readers. (July 16, 2005)

This is an important factor in determining the talk that happens in this literacy event.

The five kindergarten students involved in my study ranged from emergent, or beginning, to early readers. Becky had one instructional group of emergent readers that I observed. They participated in guided reading sessions that often blurred into shared reading because the students were early emergent readers and needed more teacher voice support. Regina had either one or two instructional groups of early readers, depending on how the students were grouped that week. They participated in a more typical form of guided reading. Teachers chose texts according to the BYL leveling system for guided reading. The texts teachers chose were slightly more challenging than their groups' independent reading level.

Regina and Becky followed a similar protocol for introducing guided reading. They began by asking the title of the book and discussing any illustrations found on the front cover. Regina explained the protocol of and her thinking for introducing texts in guided reading:

With guided reading it is a small group of children. We sit in a circle on the floor or around the table. Each child has a copy of a similar text. I introduce the text in some ways, similar to read aloud, but they are more involved. They figure out the title, look at the picture on the front. I might ask them what this book might be about, and we may look through the pictures to see what could happen in the story. But this is usually quick. (2005)

Becky also offered her rationale for introducing texts during guided reading, explaining the importance she places on the book walk:

We look at the book. We take a book walk. I might point out some words that I know that they won't know, and I will draw attention to that vocabulary as we look at the pictures. The book walk really dominates my introduction. (2005)

A book walk is a strategy that allows students to activate prior knowledge and establish background to give readers clues about what they might encounter in the text. They frequently asked students to make brief predictions about what the book might be about before moving them quickly into reading. The following introduction to guided reading from GR Transcript 2 shows a very typical example of how Regina began this event and supports their comments:

Teacher: What is the title of this book?

All: "L-o-g Hot...Log H-o-t-e-l. (sounding it out slowly)

Teacher: This book is called *Log Hotel*. Why do you think it is called *Log Hotel*?

Ali: I think it is where people stay the night.

Teacher: I don't know... I want you to read...

Student: The whole entire book?

Teacher: No, I want you to read the first page and this page and this page. When you get to this page (showing students the page) stop.

The introduction is brief, asks students to think about the connection between the title and the content of the book, and then moves them directly into reading. With the more emergent readers, Becky included a book walk, though she also kept the introduction brief. GR Transcript 1 illustrates her introduction:

Teacher: What is the title of the book?

Student: Um....

Joe: The- big...

Student: The – big- cake

Teacher: OK. You see “the” and “big”. It starts with “the Biggest”

All: The- Biggest- Cake- In –The

Joe: World.

Teacher: The title is *The Biggest Cake in the World*. Let’s take a book walk through it before we start reading, ok?

Becky first scaffolds students in decoding the title. Then, Becky uses the book walk to get students to think about the content of the book. Both teachers understand that it is important to establish background for students to be more successful in the subsequent reading.

In guided reading, teachers keep the conversation confined within the pages of the text; there is not a lot of room for digression. To help direct the children’s thinking, sometimes the introduction of guided reading included a statement to focus readers on the teaching point of the guided reading session. GR Transcript 4 provides a clear example of this:

Teacher: I have a very good book by one of my favorite authors. Who is the author?

Student: Mem Fox.

Teacher: And what is the book called?

All: Zoo-Looking.

Teacher: And what do you think this book will be about?

Student: The zoo.

Ali: Zoo animals.

Teacher: There is something about this book that makes it really interesting, and kind of easy to read. So I want you all to read to yourselves. Read three pages and then stop there and see what you notice about this book.

Again we see how Regina introduces the text, asks students to connect the title with the content of the book. Then Regina positions students to actively think about what they are reading. In the last comment from that excerpt we see her encouraging them to think metacognitively about what structure in the text helps them to read.

Only one instance in the selected transcripts shows an example of a teacher eliciting personal information from the students during the introduction of the text. GR Transcript 5 shows how Becky uses the introduction to invite students to make connections between the text and themselves:

Teacher: What is the title of this book?

All: S—sssss—m---

Student: Small?

Teacher: No, it's S-M-I-L-E (sounding it out)

Ben: Smile!

Teacher: And there is more...

All: Smile-said-dad.

Teacher: But look at what the title ends with. It ends with an exclamation point. What does that tell you?

Joe: (in a loud voice) "Smile, said dad!"

Teacher: Yes. What do you think it is going to be about?

Ben: Um, taking pictures.

Teacher: Taking pictures? Do you guys like to take pictures?

All: Yes...Uh-huh

Teacher: How many of you have cameras?

All: I do!

Ben: My dad does.

Michael: I have two.

Teacher: Let's do a book walk, and then we will go back through and read it.

First Becky supports the students in decoding the title by using a sounding out strategy. Importance is placed on the punctuation in the title, and students understand that the exclamation point indicates it is to be read with expression. Then Becky encourages students to make a personal connection with her question, "Do you guys like to take pictures?" However, she quickly brings the students back to the text by drawing them into a picture walk.

After the introduction teachers told students to read, indicating a stopping point. During this independent reading, students were asked to read quietly or to themselves while the teacher looked on. In Becky's group, the students often listened to each other and end up reading in unison. The talk in guided and shared reading occurred when students had reached the designated stopping point. Talk was regularly initiated by the teacher rather than by students when the stopping point was reached.

The conclusion of guided reading was always brief and closed to extended conversation. Becky explains how guided reading typically concluded:

Comments at the end of the book are fine if they have them, but we really kind of stop talking about the book when it ends. The point here is that we are more focused on what is in the book. (2005)

GR Transcript 2 shows how a typical guided reading session ended:

Teacher: So why is this called Log Hotel again?

Kids: Because the bugs and animals stay in the tree. They decay it.

Teacher: That is right. Great reading today.

This example shows how Regina seeks to ensure students understood the title and content of the book, and then closes the session. The task of guided reading does not require that students extend meaning beyond the literal interpretation of the text. The teachers determine a specific reading skill or strategy to focus on in guided reading, and most often steer conversation around that teaching point. Occasionally, the teaching point determined by the teacher would be reinforced at the end of the session. Regina explains this notion further:

I will bring the end of guided reading back to the teaching point. I will say this is the strategy we learned, and we might walk through where we used it in the book...just restate the lesson. (2005)

Transcript 6 shows how Regina recaps the day's teaching point:

Teacher: How did you know those were the rhyming words?

Kendra: Because I looked at the ending letters and I was like, what?! Those words rhyme.

Teacher: Ok, so now you have picked up on that pattern and you can use it to help you read....Good reading today.

The guided reading session was focused on finding patterns of rhyming words to help read the text. In this transcript, Regina asks a question to ensure that students understood how to identify rhyming words, and then reiterates how to use this strategy in reading before quickly ending the session.

In general the protocol for guided reading allowed for student talk in the beginning of the session, in between the brief independent readings, and then at the end

to reaffirm that the teaching point and some understanding had been accommodated. The next two sections will show how the teachers promoted conversation during guided reading, and how the students responded.

2) *The Teacher's Role*

Teachers remain largely in control of the conversation in guided reading. This is accomplished through the initiation of questions and comments. The most typical conversation pattern in guided reading is the IRE—initiation, response, evaluation—format instigated by the teacher (Mehan, 1979). The most prominent pattern is that the teacher is in control of initiating questions and comments. Transcript 1 shows a typical example of the IRE format used for decoding words. The following interaction occurred in GR Transcript 1 immediately after all students read the first few pages:

(all read the word 'truck' when the text written 'tank')

Teacher: Is that word truck? Look again...It looks the same as truck...It starts with a /t/ sound and ends with a /k/ sound.

Joe: A take truck?

Teacher: Does that make sense?

Joe: No.

Teacher: No. (after long pause) It is TANK.

(all read with the word tank inserted)

And later, Becky repeats the same pattern:

(all attempt to sound out the word with repeated th- th- th- sounds)

Teacher: It is "thousands". Go back and read the sentence and make sure that makes sense.

(all read slowly and haltingly)

Michael: And that's a sentence.

Teacher: Yes, that is a sentence.

(all repeat inserting the word "thousands" appropriately)

Teacher: Good reading....

(all continue reading inserting the word 'pieces' for 'people')

Teacher: It is not pieces...sound it out...

(children attempt it...)

Teacher: It is "peo—ple" (Teacher models sounding it out). Slow down.

What Becky establishes in these transcripts is that she is in control of asking the questions and there is a right or wrong answer. She questions, the students respond, and then she evaluates their response either verbally or by pausing. In this transcript the strategy Becky focused on was the sounding it out strategy. She interrupts students' reading when students miscue. Students respond, mostly as a group in this example, and she validates or rejects their attempts to correct.

In GR Transcript 2 we see another clear indication of the IRE pattern established by the teacher. The following conversation occurred directly after students reached their stopping point:

Teacher: So what do the ants and beetles do on this page?

Ali: They nibble.

Student: They soften the wood. They drill the...

Ali:holes in there so they can make the log hotel.

Student: Yeah.

Teacher: And it makes the wood soft. What is a word that means *soft* and it starts with a *D* on this page?

Kendra: Drilling?

Teacher: It wasn't drilling, look at your book. It's the last word on the page. Do you know what that word is?

All: No.....

Ali: Decays?

Teacher: Yes. How did you know that word was *decays*?

Ali: It...it is "de-cays" and it sounds like days.

Teacher: Good. Student, did you see that, how she figured out that word?

Student: Yes.

Teacher: And what does it mean to decay?

Student: To soften logs.

Ali: And to get old.

Teacher: Ok.

Student: And I get what the book is about.

Teacher: Now read two more pages and stop at the page with the fox.

In this transcript, Regina is first interested in ensuring the students comprehend the sequence of events by asking what occurred on the page. She questions, two students respond, briefly extending the meaning for each other, and then the teacher evaluates their response before moving on to a question that draws students' attention to decoding. A student answers, receives a negative evaluation from the teacher, and then Regina redirects with "look at your book" before repeating the question. This pattern continues until the end of the transcript. The only deviation is when Regina asks Ali to be metacognitive about her reading; she requires students to think about their thinking. It is

interesting to note that at the end of this example a student initiates the comment, “I get what this book is about” and the teacher ignores the initiation by not addressing it and moving the students into the next reading. By doing so, the teacher reinforces that students are not welcome to move the conversation away from literal and decoding comments.

GR Transcript #4 offers another typical example of the IRE pattern. Regina opens the conversation directly after students have independently read a short passage:

Teacher: Any ideas what makes this book easy to read?

Student: Because it has short lines and short words.

Teacher: Does it? What else?

Student: And the words are easy and short.

Teacher: Ok. I don't think you've noticed it yet...

Kendra: The pictures.

Teacher: Why don't we read a few more pages, stop when you get to the penguin page, and see if you notice anything else?

Ali: It's because when she looks at something they look back.

Teacher: That is part of it, keep reading.

Kendra: They all look back.

Teacher: They all look back. Let's go back and let's read the last word on all the pages that we have read so far. Just the last word...

All: back-black-back- crack-

Student: It rhymes...

Ali: They rhyme.

Teacher: You are right. Use that pattern and see if it helps make this book easier to read. Read the rest...

This example illustrates how the teacher evaluates students' responses without actually saying "no, that is incorrect". But essentially that is what she indicates through redirection and continued questioning. The teacher controls the content of the conversation in this guided reading by focusing the talk on her teaching point—finding the rhyming pattern.

The closing interaction in this same transcript illustrates the importance of focusing the IRE pattern around the teaching point of the guided reading. In GR Transcript 4 Regina closes this session:

Teacher: So what did the baby monkey get?

Ali: A snack.

Teacher: A snack? Should we go back and see?

Kendra: It is a smack because its an "m" and not an "n".

Teacher: You are right. Would snack make sense though?

Ali: It could, but....

Teacher: It changes it huh? We have to be very careful because just the tiniest letter can change the word and change the meaning. What do you think that baby was doing to get a smack?

Student: Maybe eating the mama's bananas.

Teacher: Ok, look at this page. "And the Zebra's tail went...."

All: Whack!

Teacher: Why do you think that word looks a little different?

Student: Oh, because it was a whack...now I forget.

Kendra: It's in...in...italics.

Teacher: That is exactly what it is. Why do you think that word is in italics?

Ali: Look at its tail. It's because it goes whack.

Teacher: Have you seen words that look funny like that before? They are called italics and a lot of times, italics are used for words that are sounds, and whack is a sound word, isn't it? Let's go ahead and read until the end of the book.

(all read...)

Teacher: On the bear page, he gets a what?

Ali: Snack.

Teacher: Yes, and all those words rhyme. What can we call those rhyming words. They are in a word....? (silence) A word...

Student: Family.

Teacher: Word families. They all have the same ending, but the meaning can be very different. Like 'snack' and 'smack' are very similar but they mean different things. Sometimes when you're reading you have to look at the words very carefully.

There is quite a lot happening in this transcript segment. The teacher acts solely as the questioner, and thus remains in complete control of the conversation. Her evaluation of student responses ranges from re-statement of students' responses to a direct yes or no evaluation. In this example, Regina asks one question that prompts students to interpret meaning. She asks, "What do you think that baby was doing to get a smack?" A student responds appropriately and then the thread is dropped. It is not a meaningful request for interpretation because the interaction is so brief. Regina focuses intently on her teaching points: first that students need to use visual information carefully, next that sound words can be indicated with italics, then that there is a rhyming pattern to attend to, and finally that students have to be careful readers.

Teachers initiate conversation in guided reading. In all of these transcript excerpts, the teacher always initiates the first comment or question after the reading.

Students take a passive role in the direction and content of the conversation in guided reading and refrain from initiation. The transcripts also illustrate the ping-pong conversation pattern of guided reading where it goes from teacher to student back to teacher then to student, and so on. There are very few instances where students respond to or build on other students' comments. If this does occur, the student-to-student responses only happen twice before the teacher again inserts a comment or question.

Teachers ask closed-ended questions in guided reading. The transcripts previously analyzed in this section identified the IRE pattern of guided reading. One reason this format is so prevalent is due to the kind of questions the teachers ask. It is important to note here that Becky asked more open-ended, interpretive kinds of questions during the book walks in the introduction of the text. A book walk is a strategy to establish background knowledge and to give emergent readers clues as to what they might encounter during reading. In these instances, the questioning contained a mixture of closed and open-ended question. During the main part of the guided reading sessions, however, teachers were more likely to use closed-ended questions. Closed-ended questions ensured students' answers were brief and in direct relation to the question asked. Furthermore, closed-ended questions indicated to students that there is a right or wrong response. The following excerpts illustrate closed-ended questions typical in every guided reading segment:

Teacher: How did you know this was sugar and not flour? (Transcript 1)

Teacher: What do people normally use chainsaws for? (Transcript 1)

Teacher: What is a word that means soft and starts with a D on this page?
(Transcript 2)

Teacher: What is growing on the log? (Transcript 2)

Teacher: How did the story end? (Transcript 2)

Teacher: Do we have trolleys here in Columbia? (Transcript 3)

Teacher: Who is getting on the trolley? (Transcript 3)

Teacher: On the bear page, he gets a what? (Transcript 4)

Teacher: It ends with an exclamation point. What does that tell you?
(Transcript 5)

Teacher: How can you figure this [word] out? (Transcript 6)

Teacher: Which words rhymed in this? (Transcript 6)

The closed-ended questions allow the teacher to maintain focus on the teaching point of the guided reading session, even when students want to go somewhere else. The examples above are typical kinds of questions asked throughout the entire event.

Teachers state comments designed to elicit student talk concerning the decoding process. In addition to closed-ended questions, teachers use knowing statements to affirm or redirect students. The following excerpt from GR Transcript 6 illustrates a common example of this pattern:

Teacher: How can you figure this [word] out?

(Kendra attempts to sound it out, and finally the teacher supplies the word 'through')

Teacher: So Kendra noticed that she didn't know a word. Did anyone else have a hard time with this word?

Student: No.

Teacher: How did you know what that word was?

Student: Because I already knew that word.

Teacher: That is kind of a hard word.

Student: Yeah, I was stuck on it, too.

Teacher: What is hard about this word is that it has a “g” and an “h” in it, and do you hear any g or h in it? In this word these sounds are silent. So what else did you notice as you read this page to yourself? Did you notice anything about the way that it was written?

The teacher uses direct statements to reiterate teaching points. This happens frequently throughout the guided reading sessions.

Teachers closely adhere to their teaching agenda. The content of the teachers’ talk focuses mainly on naming skills and affirming that students comprehend the literal sequence. Teachers acknowledge that this is their primary goal. Regina explains that in guided reading the purpose is to focus on, “what reading strategies they are using to decode. I introduce them to new strategies and ideas to help them become better readers” (2005). And Becky echoes this sentiment stating:

[Guided reading] is where we can bring in our teaching points to our students. We can work on the things our students need to be successful readers, things like making predictions, decoding words, comprehension and other strategies like that. This is where my direct reading instruction comes in, so it’s more teacher-directed than other literacy experiences. (2005)

Regina and Becky both have a clearly articulated understanding of their purpose for guided reading and this guides their talk and the talk they elicit from students.

It is not uncommon for teachers to disregard students if they make a comment that does not fit with the teaching focus of the guided reading. For example in GR Transcript 6 the following occurred:

Teacher: Which words rhymed in this?

Kendra: Rustling and leaves.

Teacher: Leaves rhymed with what?

Kendra: Rustling?

Teacher: Do those two words sound the same?

Student: Why are there ants... (pointing to the illustration)

Teacher: Please pay attention.

Ali: Leaves and trees.

Student: But why....

Teacher: Yes, that is right. It gives it a rhythm, doesn't it? Listen... (teacher reads.)

When a student tried to draw attention to something he noticed in the illustration, the teacher puts a stop to it two times successively. This sends a clear message to all students that guided reading is not a time for digression from the text, and in this case, from the teaching point of rhyming words. That the words rhyme is debatable, but the teacher clearly feels that it is important to adhere to her teaching agenda. In other examples, teachers issue statements such as “please continue reading” (GR Transcript 5), or “I don't think you've noticed it yet. Keep looking” (GR Transcript 4). These comments are designed to keep students on task. In another example, GR Transcript 1 shows how students' noticings can be ignored:

Teacher: I want you to read the first page and this page and this page. When you get to this page stop. Read to yourselves.

(children read silently)

Ali: Holy cow! (after reading the first page).

(children finish reading)

Teacher: So what do the ants and beetles do on this page?

This sequence shows very clearly that Ali noticed something that amazed her about what she read. Rather than ask her to expand or share her thinking, the teacher lets the

comment go unaddressed because she doesn't want the event disrupted. Again, the teacher has an agenda and sticks to it.

The teacher acts as the knower in guided reading. Teachers control the direction of the conversation through questioning and evaluation of student's responses. Teachers frequently confirm or reject student responses without asking for additional clarification or explanation. In guided reading the teachers enter into the event with a teaching point, or identify a teaching point from the students reading, and that becomes the agenda for the session. Teachers focus their talk on reading skills and strategies and steer the conversation around these points. Thus, the teacher in guided reading is in a position of power in these exchanges.

3) *Characteristics of Student Talk*

Students in guided reading talk when a response is required. Just as the teachers' main responsibility in guided reading is to initiate, students in guided reading mainly fall into the role of respondent. At the beginning of guided reading teachers establish a brief background. Students' responses include some predicting and hypothesizing. In GR Transcript 1, Becky elicits this kind of response from her students during the book walk for *The Biggest Cake in the World*:

Teacher: ... What is this?

Student: Sugar.

Teacher: Sugar. How did you know it was sugar and not flour?

Kendra: It looks like a super lot of sugar.

Joe: Cause you can read it here, it says sugar.

(laughter)

Teacher: I was thinking, where would you take all this stuff and how would you mix it all together?

Michael: With a gigantic spoon.

Student: And with a gigantic....bowl.

This transcript demonstrates that when students comment, they are doing so in response to the teacher's questioning. In this case, the teacher asks questions designed to promote students' metacognitive thinking, for example, "How did you know it was sugar and not flour?" She also asks students to think hypothetically, "Where would you take all this stuff?" Therefore, students respond appropriately. As outlined in the protocol, teachers keep this kind of open-ended questioning brief and sporadic during guided reading. For example, remember in GR Transcript 2, Regina asks only one open question:

Teacher: This book is called *Log Hotel*. Why do you think it is called *Log Hotel*?

Ali: I think it is where people stay the night.

Teacher: I don't know. I want you to read...

Regina asks the open question, "Why do you think it is called *Log Hotel*?" Ali infers the response, "I think it is where people stay the night". She is using her background knowledge about hotels to respond. However, Regina quickly lets the question drop. By moving on she is allowing for the possibility that Ali's comment may or may not be correct. This suggests students should continue to think about it, even if it is not something that should be discussed further. GR Transcript 3 includes a similar occurrence:

Teacher: ...Where do you think we would see trolleys?

All: Hmmm...?

Teacher: Have you seen them on TV, or in the movies?

Josh: Yeah. And in Mr. Rogers there's a trolley.

Ellie: I haven't.

Teacher: Oh, you are right...I haven't seen Mr. Rogers in forever. Ok, you guys, let's go through this book before we start reading it and look at the pictures together...

The open-ended question about trolleys is quickly concluded. Both of these excerpts show that the teacher asks the students to respond by inferring or predicting. However, when the students do so, the conversation thread is quickly dropped. During guided reading, the type of responses from students that could be classified as predictive or hypothetical occurs on average 2-3 times. When Becky guided students through a book walk, this category of student response happened more frequently. During the actual reading however, students' responses fell within the previously stated average.

The talk interaction between teacher and student falls into adjacency pairs. The role of students as responders encouraged this conversation pattern. Adjacency pairs are a function of turn-taking in conversations and explain how conversations can be broken into pairs of exchanges (Levinson, 1983). Adjacency pairs refer to a conversation pattern where one turn is related in inevitable ways to the turns, or talk, that comes before and after. Adjacency pairs usually begin with one person asking a question, usually the knower, and then answered by another member or participant before returning to the initiator again. During guided reading, the first move of adjacency pairs came from the teacher. The following transcript segments show occurrences of adjacency. This first occurs in GR Transcript 1:

Teacher: Well look how much flour that is.

Michael: A lot, because....

Teacher: How much flour do you usually use for a cake?

Student: One... just like a half.

Teacher: Have any of you ever made a cake before?

Joe: Yes.

Teacher: Ok, look at how big this milk truck is.

All: "wow" and "ooooh"

The adjacency pair pattern is obvious in this excerpt, beginning with the teacher, moving to a student, going back to the teacher, and so forth. And then again in GR Transcript 2, we see a long occurrence of the ever present adjacency pattern:

Teacher: What is growing on the log?

Ali: Fungi

Teacher: Did you see that on this page? And inside the log the fungi looks like...

Student: Mushrooms.

Teacher: On the outside it looks like mushrooms, but on the inside it looks like what? Look on the page. It tells you. This word right here on the middle of the page. It starts with an "sp".

Alexandria: Spinach?

Teacher: Spinach? You think? Look at the word very closely. It is not spinach.

Ali: Spaghetti?

Teacher: Ooh, how did you know it was spaghetti?

Ali: Because I remember it has a "g and an "h" in it and it does.

Teacher: She remembers seeing this word before. Let's look at this word together. Let's look at all the sounds together, not just the g and h.

The conversation goes from teacher to student to teacher and back. Adjacency happened in short intervals as well. See the following example from GR Transcript 3:

Teacher: What do you notice about every page? What is the only thing that changes?

Student: The animals...

Teacher: And?

Joe: ...and the pictures.

Teacher: Yes, the animals and the pictures. And the animal is the only word that changes in each new sentence, isn't it? Ok, ready to keep reading?

And in GR Transcript 6:

Kendra: It is kind of like a song.

Teacher: Yes, it is kind of like a song. Look at the next part....there is a pattern...find the words that rhyme there...

(kids throw out words...)

Student: Chimpanzee and Chattering.

Teacher: Do Chimpanzee and Chattering rhyme?

(some tentative "yeah" responses)

Ali: No.

Teacher: Why do you say no?

Ali: Because they don't sound the same. They start the same.

Teacher: OK, trees and leaves. When you say that, what is the rhyming sound?

Student: I don't think they sound like they rhyme to me, though.

Teacher: Say those words...what sound is the same?

Ali: Leaves come from trees, too.

Teacher: What sound is the same?

Kendra: The “eee” sound and the s.

Teacher: Yes. Can anyone see the rhyming in the next passage? Let’s read it together and see what we can find.

In these examples of adjacency pairs, the students take the second turn. The only exception to this is in GR Transcript 6 when Ali suggests the book sounds like a song. The teacher acknowledges this statement, and then takes the conversation back by initiating another question. After that, the adjacency pattern is back in place. Looking at student talk through the lens of adjacency pairs clarifies the characteristics of their talk in the guided reading literacy event. For example, a question anticipates an answer and students meet that expectation. A statement from the teacher anticipates a student response in the form of an agreement, a modification, or even a disagreement, though disagreements are extremely rare in guided reading. A command or request, such as “let’s keep reading”, or “look at this page” from the teacher anticipates acquiescence from the student.

The content of student talk focuses on reading strategies, features of text and retelling according to the teaching agenda. Now that the structure of talk during guided reading has been explored, it is useful to examine exactly *what* students talked about in guided reading. Students discuss illustrations if the talk occurred during a picture walk, express word decoding strategies between the independent readings, examine text structures, and demonstrate comprehension usually towards the end of the session. For example, GR Transcript 1 shows students interpreting the illustrations:

Teacher: How does that fit into that? (pointing to the cake in the illustration)

Student: They.....

Michael: (interrupting) They take it [the cake] and put it in, and it looks like a white house with fire on the bottom.

Joe: Yeah, they do.

Teacher: Alex, what do you think?

Student: There is a kid asleep and then the fireman came and gave him some water.

Teacher: (laugh) I have never noticed that.

Student: I always have.

Teacher: Oh, that's good. What else?

Michael: Now they're taking the cake out.

Teacher: Why do they need a tractor?

Student: To pull it...

This transcript exemplifies a typical book walk. The teacher is guiding the conversation, focusing students on the illustrations and what they mean. Students demonstrate that they can read illustrations to generate meaning. They comment on what is obvious in the illustration, and occasionally on things less obvious. They are in tune with what is depicted in the illustration.

Student talk also focuses on decoding strategies such as sounding words out, identifying spelling patterns, context, vocabulary and reaffirming strategies. Transcript 3 shows how students use phonological information to identify a word:

Teacher: How did you know that word was zoomed?

Joe: z—z—z—z I knew it started with the zzz sound.

Teacher: Read the next page.

(All read “And then the trolley zoomed off!”)

Student: We knew that word because it was already in there.

Teacher: You are right; you already saw that word.

This excerpt shows students' knowledge of beginning sounds, and how to recognize words that are repeated in the text. In GR Transcript 3, student talk focuses on the text feature of italics:

Teacher: ... look at this page. "And the Zebra's tail went...."

All: Whack!

Teacher: Why do you think that word looks a little different?

Student: Oh, because it was a whack...now I forget.

Ali: It's in...in....Italics.

Teacher: That is exactly what it is. Why do you think that word is in italics?

Alli: Look at its tail. It's because it shows it goes whack.

Teacher: Have you seen words that look funny like that before? They are called italics and a lot of times, italics are used for words that are sounds, and whack is a sound word, isn't it?

And in GR Transcript 6 we can see how students' talk centers around the rhyming pattern in the book:

Teacher: How did you know those were the rhyming words?

Kendra: Because I looked at the ending letters and I was like, what?! Those words rhyme.

Teacher: Ok, so now you have picked up on that pattern and you can use it to help you read.

In all of these transcripts students' talk centers on skills, strategies and features of text.

Their talk confirms that they are not extending meaning beyond decoding and literal comprehension. My field notes confirm this finding. I noted:

Children's concentration during [guided reading] is on decoding the words, getting them right. Therefore, they often lose fluency and expression and meaning, which is ironic since it is a determined outcome of guided reading for teachers. They offer no attempts at discussion. (March 15, 2005)

The way the teacher has scaffolded this event has helped students determine that in guided reading they are figuring out the words in the text, not discussing what it means. Even though teachers have identified that comprehension is part of guided reading, the transcripts reveal that it is not a priority.

Student talk in guided reading is comprised of short comments and questions. To examine this characteristic of talk it is useful to look at the length of student utterances. Student talk occurred in short phrases or sentences, and frequently, students did not use complete sentences. The transcripts highlighted in the section demonstrate how students answer as briefly and efficiently as possible. Talk is characterized by one word answers, and rarely lengthens beyond one sentence responses.

4) Guided Reading Summary

Guided reading occurred in small instructional groups during the daily literacy block. Regina and Becky each had one guided reading group, and together, the two groups included my five case students. Teachers chose texts based on the instructional levels of the readers. The teachers introduced the text to the students before allowing them to read independently. Independent readings were interspersed with talk about the text and the teaching focus.

The teacher is in a position of power in guided reading. Power is asserted by the use of initiations in the form of questions and commands. The teacher initiates talk in guided reading, either by stating a comment that expects a response, or by asking questions, most frequently in closed-ended format. Format follows an IRE sequence

characterized by adjacency pairs. Occasionally, the teacher includes an evaluation of student response. The evaluation component occurs most often when she is trying to focus students on her teaching point. In guided reading, the teacher has an agenda and moves the event along according to her plan. She discourages student talk that would take the group off task.

Students in guided reading are mainly respondents. It was uncommon for students to initiate talk, though it did occur on average, 1-2 times each session. Students took the second turn in the adjacency pair pattern. Their talk was characterized by short sentences and phrases, and the content of the talk focused on demonstrating literal comprehension and word attack strategies.

Literature Discussion

During the literacy block, teachers met with all students in small literature discussion groups. Older students participated in the more traditional version of literature discussion, reading independently then coming together to discuss the text. Younger students participated in a read aloud literature discussion group where the teacher read a short text aloud, pausing occasionally to allow for conversation. Literature circles, or literature discussion groups are commonly understood as small groups of students gathered together to discuss a piece of literature in depth; a goal of this event is for students to become critical thinkers as they engage in ongoing dialogue stemming from a book (Shlick-Noe & Johnson, 1999).

In order to uncover what occurred during literature discussion for both students and teachers I describe this event in terms of 1) protocol; 2) the teacher's role in

promoting and sustaining the talk during the literacy event; 3) the characteristics of student talk; and 4) a summary of the literacy event.

1) Literature Discussion Protocol

Both Regina and Becky worked with literature discussion groups for both younger and older students during their designated 45 minute instructional time. Regina was almost entirely responsible for the read aloud literature discussion groups of the younger children during the time I conducted my inquiry. My five case study students were in one small literature discussion group. Regina briefly described the protocol for literature discussion:

In literature discussion groups, students are seated in a small group in a circle, either at a table or on the floor. That is just so the kids can feel like they are talking to each other and not just the teacher, which is the more what happens in read aloud since we are at the front of the whole group for that. (2005)

Regina determined that the structure of students' seating arrangement communicates an important message to them. In this case, the message is that talk is valued among students as well as with the teacher.

Texts were chosen carefully according to Regina. She explains her thinking about choosing literature discussion texts:

I try to choose [books] based on the content and the book. I try to choose books that might evoke disagreement or emotion, or maybe it is about something that the kids have experienced. I try to find books that have a deeper question that needs to be answered. If I read a book and it strikes me on an emotional level, a gut level or maybe there is a big surprise then I'll bring it in. Really, anything that I think kids will talk and think about.

Sometimes, Regina revisited a text from a content area lesson, a whole group morning read aloud, or even from an earlier literature discussion. When she revisited a text, she indicated that she wanted to see how students' thinking changed or how it differed from

the earlier reading. For example, when Regina re-read *Ghost Wings*, LD Transcript 6, she stated:

Teacher: I liked reading it so much the first time with you guys that I thought we could read it again. It will be interesting to see what kinds of things you think now.

And in LD Transcript 1, she explained:

Teacher: This book is called *A Chair for my Mother*. Do you remember reading this before?

(a mix of no's and yes's)

Teacher: Some of you have and some haven't. That's great, some of you will think about it for the first time, and some of you can revisit your old thoughts. This is a good one. It says in the dedication, "To the memory of my mother".

However, Regina most commonly chose texts that were new to the students. The texts Regina chose represented a wide spectrum of topics and content. As she explained in her interview, she intuitively selected texts that would make students think; texts that would give them something to talk about.

In literature discussion the introduction of the text followed a similar format. Regina was clear that the introduction of the text is not where the bulk of conversation occurred. She stated, "I introduce the book, and we talk about who might know it, what the book might be about, just get prior knowledge before we even start reading. But we don't spend too much time talking at this point" (2005). LD Transcript 1 demonstrates a typical introduction in literature discussion:

Teacher: Today we are going to...

Joe: (interrupting) I have read that book before!

Teacher.....read *The Wall*. How many of you have read this before? (Some raise their hands). So, a few of you have.

Joe: Just once.

Teacher: Good. Let's read it and see what we think about it.

Ben: It's sad.

Teacher: It is a little sad. My mother gave me this book, and see it is signed by both the author and the illustrator. And Eve Bunting, the author, said, "Dear readers: The wall is for all of us". And then the illustrator said, "Children: Live in such a way that we will never need another wall like this one".

Joe: Hmmm.

Teacher: Maybe we can come back to that and talk about what that means after we read this. Be thinking about it.

Regina begins by reading the title of the text, which is standard procedure, before finding out if this is a familiar text to students. She reads the dedication written in the text by the author and illustrator, offering students insight into the content of the story and sets a purpose for the students when she asks students to think about the dedication while she is reading. LD Transcript 4 shows another example of a brief introduction:

Teacher: Today our book for discussion is *Meet Danitra Brown*.

Ali: We read this a while ago when we did black history.

Kendra: It is written as a poem.

(Teacher reads)

It is actually Ali who draws attention to the fact that this is a familiar text. And Kendra extends the introduction by commenting on the format of the text. Regina does not follow up on the comments, rather, she moves directly into the reading.

One exception to the succinct introduction so typical of literature discussion can be found in LD Transcript 6. Here students have a lengthy opening conversation, though it is not initiated by the teacher to introduce the text. Rather, it comes from the students.

Kendra is actually the one who makes the opening comment, setting the trend for a student dominated conversation thread:

Kendra: This book is about butterflies.

Teacher: Ok, yes it is. Today we are going to read *Ghost Wings*.

Kendra: Which I already read.

Ali: We all....we all....

Ben: I like that.

Ali: Ghost Wings? Oooh, oooh! (intoned in a scary voice)

Joe: Me too.

Michael: I love it.

Teacher: Kendra brought it back from the library a while ago...

Kendra: When I studied Mexico.

Ben: It's kind of sad.

Kendra: Yeah it is kind of sad.

Teacher: Do you remember what it is about?

Many: Yeah...Yes..

Ben: It is with her grandma...Her grandma dies.

Kendra: When the butterflies flew from the magic hill....whatever that was.

Michael: Um...magic circle.

Kendra: Yeah, magic circle.

Teacher: Good memory. It's been a long time since we've read this. I liked this book so much when we read it the first time...

This transcript contains the longest introduction. It is not typical that literature discussions include a lengthy opening conversation because there is so much conversation embedded throughout the reading.

Talk can occur at any time during literature discussion. Teachers have identified the goal of literature discussion as drawing out student talk; therefore, they welcome conversation threads at any time. Though conversation during the introduction of the text is usually brief, there are exceptions as seen in Transcript 6. Most of the conversation occurs around teachers' readings--readings that normally last from 1 to 3 pages in duration. Regina reads, then pauses, and if students have comments or questions they offer it during that suspension. I noted on March 22, that "[T]eachers use the same pausing technique that they do in read aloud, but they use it here far more". This results in mini-conversations surrounded by text, similar to the structure of read aloud.

Conversation occurs again at the end of the reading as well. My observation notes reflect this protocol:

Even though conversation happens throughout literature discussion, when the book is finished students dig in deep. Here they are more likely to leave the text. (March 22, 2005)

The teacher is usually the one to launch the conversation thread when the reading is finished. It is not uncommon for teachers to attempt to pull the entire reading together. In LD Transcript 1, we see how the teacher attempts to instigate conversation concerning a major theme from the text.

Teacher: Is the chair in this book important?

Ben: It helps her remember her mom.

Joe: Yeah, if she dies, she will have the chair to remember.

Teacher: Interesting. Other thoughts?

Ali: I wonder where her dad is? Maybe he got burned...

Ben: Maybe he died in the fire.

And in LD Transcript 2, she poses this question:

Teacher: Well, let's talk about these inscriptions that I read in the beginning. The Illustrator said, "Children" that is you all, "live in such a way that we will never need another wall like this one".

LD Transcript 4, illustrates how the teacher simply opens up the opportunity for talk, stating:

Teacher: What did you learn or think about that you hadn't thought of before?

Every transcript reflects Regina's desire to hash out the texts' big ideas.

Regardless of who instigates the ending conversation, Regina allows talk to continue until the students have finished. She explains this further:

In literature discussion sometimes the most discussion happens after the entire book has been read. That seems to be when we get into the real meat. Usually once it feels like we get deep enough, I will just say, wow interesting, just for closure. But I will stop when they are ready to stop, time allowing.

Though Regina obviously has an agenda that literature discussion is for deep thinking and talking about texts, students have a great deal of control over the direction of the conversation, and when the conversation ends.

2) *The Teacher's Role*

Teachers in literature discussion allow students more control over the direction of the conversation. This distinguishes the teacher's role in literature discussion as different from her role in other literacy events. The teacher is critical to the success of literature discussion. By virtue of taking a less directive role in conversation, she indicates to students that they are in the driver's seat. She listens for students' deeper thinking about

the text. One of the most successful ways that Regina manages to let students know the conversation is theirs to guide is through her use of pauses. Often after reading a passage, she will simply pause to allow students to comment or question if they wish. She does not take herself completely out of the conversation; rather, she is just another group member.

Teachers in literature discussion ask more open-ended questions than in any other event. Questions are strategically and thoughtfully placed to evoke student thought and subsequent discussion. Teachers share the responsibility with students to initiate conversation in literature discussion. However, the teachers continue to ask the majority of questions. Teachers model here how to ask questions. The following are examples of open-ended questions that Regina asked to elicit discussion:

- Why do you think she is putting half of her money into the jar? (Transcript 1)
- How do you think they are feeling about this whole thing? (Transcript 1)
- Tell me more about the inscription, what do you think it means? (Transcript 2)
- Did [this book] have some kind of lesson? (Transcript 2)
- Why was he wishing for a friend like a girl in the picture? (Transcript 3)
- What does this page say to you? There are no words... (Transcript 3)
- Why the blacker the berry the sweeter the juice? (Transcript 4)
- What did you learn or think about that you hadn't before? (Transcript 4)
- So why does grandma say that? (Transcript 5)
- What do you think the police are thinking about? (Transcript 5)
- What does it mean when grandmother says, 'They carry the souls of the old butterflies and the old ones never really leave'? (Transcript 6)
- How can she scare [the monsters] away? (Transcript 6)

It is the skillful questioning of the teacher that keeps students talking. Because so many of the questions she asked are of this open-ended nature, all students are safe to contribute without fear of offering a “wrong” comment. These questions scaffold kids’ thinking or responses because they are open-ended and evoke student generations; they guide students towards deeper thinking about the text.

Teachers use careful language to notice students' comments and to encourage thinking. Teachers make a concerted effort to try not to evaluate students' comments; they want to encourage thinking and expression, but avoid a blatant evaluation. LD

Transcript 1 shows a common word choice of Regina's:

Michael: And there is something I know. Everything that they buy or do, is always shown at the bottom of the picture.

Teacher: Interesting.

Ben: It is to help you read the story.

Regina almost entirely refrains from saying such obvious value statement such as *good* or *that's right*. And though "interesting" indicates that the comment pleases the teacher, it is a word that keeps students thinking. Whereas, a *good* or *that's right* type of comments indicate closure—that students can be finished thinking—the word *interesting* implies there is more to consider.

LD Transcript 3 highlights another tactic Regina uses to urge students to continue talking:

Ben: Or...Oh! Because he doesn't have friends.

Teacher: Tell me more.

Ben: Well, because the book said he doesn't have friends but I bet he wants more friends, but he has only that balloon.

Michael: A friend that can talk to him.

Kendra: He only has one balloon.

Michael: So he has someone to play with if you don't have anyone else, like a sister or a brother.

Ali: I have a little sister but not an older one.

Kendra: I used to have a sister, but she died, and you all know that because I told you all last year.

Ben: But are you getting another sister?

Kendra: Yeah, May 18. It is going to be a girl.

Regina simply offers, “Tell me more” and it gives way to conversation where students went further to analyze a character’s rationale. Students moved on to hypothesize and make personal connections. Regina uses phrase such as this and poses the question, “Why?” to get students to think further.

In LD Transcript 5 we see more evidence of Regina’s careful language choices. This excerpt illustrates a literature discussion group where students deconstruct the book, *Whitewash*. In this book Helene-Angel, a young girl, walks with her older brother, Mauricio, home from school. One day on the way home Hawks, a gang of white thugs, beat up Mauricio and spray white paint on Helene-Angel’s face. Helene-Angel is understandably devastated and embarrassed, and her grandmother’s comfort is not enough to help the girl handle her fears. The media camps outside of Helene-Angel’s home to tell the story. The following discussion occurred mid way through the book.

Ben: The newspapers are always there. They are talking to someone about what happened.

Ali: ...trying to get the bad guys.

Joe: I see police.

Ben: Maybe the police are going to arrest the people who did this to them.

Kendra: And some people are recording, um, they are recording what the victims said.

Teacher: Are they [the media] helping or making it worse?

Joe: Making it worse.

Ali: Making it worse.

Teacher: Why?

Joe: Because they are just yelling “White for a day! White for a day!” a whole bunch of times. They are talking about white people and black people and all that stuff. They’re saying a lot of bad words, like black people.

Ali: Well, it doesn’t say any bad words in there.

Joe: I know, but they are yelling, “White for a day”. And that is not good.

This transcript illustrates the back seat role the teacher takes in literature discussion. She scaffolds student talk through careful questioning. When Ben notices the media on the scene, the teacher first asks if they are helping the situation or making it worse, before adding the open-ended “Why?” that allows Joe to launch into a lengthy explanation of why he feels uncomfortable with the situation depicted in the text. And when challenged by Ali, he sticks firmly to what he believed. The teacher’s questioning allows students to be the main ones who talk, while at the same time, she gives them something to think and talk about.

Finally, teachers are careful to use language that indicates to students that the purpose of literature discussion is to think. At the beginning and the end of the event, teachers commonly remark on students’ thinking. For example in LD Transcript 1, the teacher sets the reading up in the following way:

Teacher: This book is called *A Chair for my Mother*. Have any of you read this before?

(a mix of no’s and yes’s)

Teacher: Some of you have and some haven’t. That’s great, some of you will think about it for the first time, and some of you can revisit your old thoughts. This is a good one. It says in the dedication, “To the memory of my mother”.

This sends a clear message to students that their thinking is valued. Another example of this occurs in LD Transcript 6 when the teacher makes this comment, “I liked reading [this book] so much the first time with you guys that I thought we could read it again. It will be interesting to see what kinds of things you think now”. This comment informs students that the teacher is looking for them to share their thoughts about the book.

Teachers often close the literature discussion event with comments such as, “That was great thinking”. All of these comments indicate to students that their thinking is worthy of expression.

The teacher acts as member and facilitator of the group, careful not to dominate talk. Regina will state comments that reveal her own insights about texts, however, these are rare. She does this so that she does not overly influence students’ thinking. She is far more interested in what they have to say. Often Regina’s questioning will reveal her position, but she hesitates to make too many direct statements. For example, in LD Transcript 1, Regina asks:

Teacher: Is the chair in this book important?

Ben: It helps her remember her mom.

Joe: Yeah, if she dies, she will have the chair to remember.

Though students could have answered no, the chair wasn’t important, the way Regina phrases it indicates that she believes the chair to be important to the story. It is not a comment, it is a question, yet it conveys her idea the same way. When Regina did make direct comments, they were usually to clarify vocabulary or plot. We see this in LD Transcript 2:

Teacher: Do you know what Missing in Action means?

Joe: I know what action means.

Ben: It's like when people go missing from action, from war.

Joe: Yeah, like they snuck away.

Teacher: That can be true. There are a lot of soldiers that they don't know if they died. They probably did, but they are not sure, so those names are on the wall, too.

Regina asks a question to determine if children understood the text, but she allows them to think it through before offering a statement clarifying the term *Missing in Action*. This happened frequently throughout all literature discussion transcripts.

The way the teacher refrains from initiating comments and questions compels students to fill the role of the initiator. Often Regina encouraged student talk in literature discussion groups simply by refraining from commenting on students' ideas, and by refraining from confirming or denying the ideas students expressed. This behavior can be seen in every transcript. In LD Transcript 1, we see a pattern of how Regina allows students to talk without evaluating what they say:

(teacher reads...)

Teacher: Why do you think she is putting half of her money into the jar?

Ben: Maybe for the chair.

Kendra: To save for things they need.

(teacher reads...)

Ali: Like I save my money.

Michael: My mom gave me 20 dollars for chores.

Kendra: I had two, two dollar bills once.

(teacher reads...)

Ben: I can see where they used to sit down on the chair (referring to illustration) and it looks like a chair we used to have.

Joe: It looks like a two person chair. I bet they sat there together.

Ali: It was a big chair.

(teacher reads...)

Regina asks an opening question and allows Ben and Kendra to answer without evaluating what they have to offer. This happens repeatedly. She first reads, then students talk, and when they stop, she reads again. Ali offers a comment, and when that mini thread runs out, she reads again. This gives a message to the students that they do not need her permission or approval to speak. We see another very typical example of this in Transcript 6:

(Teacher reads...)

(Ends with “there was no one between me and the monsters”)

Joe: She could scare them away.

Kendra: It’s just her and the monsters and the

Teacher: How can she scare them away?

Ben: The broom!

Ali: Well, if I was in the story, I would get a dinosaur in there.

Joe: Yeah.

Michael: But listen, they are not real, they are just toys.

Ben: I think they are toys

Ali: I think she just believes in them.

Kendra: If I was in the story, I would just go, boom! (makes a fist)

Teacher: What if they are in your imagination?

Joe: Or in your dreams.

Ben: Sometimes I get scared, too, like...

Joe: (pointing to illustration) That looks like a toy laying there.

Teacher: Ben, go ahead...

Ben: Sometimes I don't like it when my parents go out and we have a babysitter.

Ali: But you always got your brother in your room.

Ben: But he annoys me.

Teacher: He does? (laughs)

(teacher reads....)

Regina doesn't dominate conversation but she does regulate it at times. She encourages students to speak when she can sense they have something to say. She reads, and allows Ali to initiate. When she wants them to say more, she asks a question, then again sits back and listens. Regina does not confirm or deny anything students say, and at the end, she shows humor when Ben describes how his brother is no help against fears at night. Finally, she simply returns to the text. Regina is a member of the group, yet she is also the facilitator.

3) Characteristics of Student Talk

Students' language in literature discussion is fascinating to observe. At times they are amazing in their sophistication. Other times, it is clear they are approximating language—what they should say, and even how to phrase sentences. The role of the student in literature discussion is varied.

In literature discussion students play a large role in initiating questions and comments to launch a conversation thread. They are comfortable with this role, often

talking over one another with how much they have to contribute. This is seen consistently throughout the transcripts. In LD Transcript 1 from *A Chair for my Mother* the following transpired:

(teacher reads...)

Michael: And there is something I know. Everything that they buy or do is always shown at the bottom of the picture.

Teacher: Interesting....

Ben: It is to help you read the story.

(teacher reads...)

(Ends with...“everything in the house ruined.”)

Ali: Even the chair?

Ben: No, they haven't bought the chair yet. This was the old house that burned down.

Ali: Oh.

Michael: And there it is (pointing). The old burnt up chair.

Here we see that Michael and Ali are the first to initiate conversation when the teacher pauses in reading. Michael makes a statement and Ali asks a question for clarification.

And again, in LD Transcript 2 from *The Wall*:

(Teacher reads....)

(Ends with, “I can see the dark trees behind us and the dark flying clouds”)

Joe: But where is his Grandpa's name?

Michael: His grandpa died, I bet.

Ali: They're looking.

Joe: Yeah, they're looking.

Joe is the initiator in this example, asking a question for clarification and extending the meaning for all the students in the group. In LD Transcript 5 from *Whitewash* we see another common occurrence of student initiation:

(teacher reads)

Ali: Why did she have to wait for her brother?

Ben: Because he walks her home.

Joe: Yeah.

(teacher reads)

Joe: They put white wash on her, on her face.

Ben: They want her to be white because they don't like black people.

Michael: Yeah, they are white people.

Kendra: They don't like her and they want her to be white.

In this example Ali asks a question about something from the text that she doesn't understand, and later, Joe makes a statement that encourages talk from his peers. The examples here demonstrate that students are clearly comfortable in the role of initiators. If they have a question, or feel the need to make a comment, they do so without hesitation.

In literature discussion, students talk to each other, not only to the teacher. One defining characteristic of talk in literature discussion is that student-to-student responses are far more common in this literacy event. In most academic situations a common talk pattern bounces from teacher to student back to teacher in the adjacency pair format described earlier. If student-to-student interactions occur they are usually only sustained

two or three turns. This is not the case in literature discussion. LD Transcript 1 offers a brief but typical example of this:

Ali: Look (pointing to the illustration)! Look how everyone is helping carry things in.

Ben: Yeah, look at that big table.

Kendra: And there is the stuffed bear that someone gave her.

Students frequently say, “Yeah” or “Yes” to indicate they heard the comment and have something to offer that builds on it. LD Transcript 3 from *The Red Balloon* shows this same type of interaction:

Ali: Did his balloon get hit?

Ben: Yeah, see there. It popped.

Kendra: Probably it is in balloon heaven.

Joe: It looks like a big rock is tied to a string now.

Ben: And now there are a whole bunch of balloons.

Joe: It is a crowd of balloons.

Students are building on each other’s ideas. They are talking to each other and extending the meaning of the text for one another. They are clearly interacting with one another almost unaware of the teacher. Earlier transcripts in this section confirm this finding

Extending the meaning is a trademark in literature discussion for kindergarten students. Students commonly grappled with complex concepts in literature discussion. In *Ghost Wings*, a young Mexican girl’s grandmother takes her to the ‘Magic Circle’ of fir trees to say goodbye to the monarchs as they get ready for their migration. At one point, a butterfly that has landed on the girl’s arm flies away, but she claims that her arm still tickles. Then grandmother says “That’s because they carry the souls of the old ones,

and the old ones never really leave". When Grandmother dies, all the girl can think about is that she lost the feeling of tickle, and she feels she can hardly remember her grandmother. In LD Transcript 6 we see students struggling to understand this:

Teacher: What does it mean when grandmother says about the butterflies 'That's because they carry the souls of the old ones, and the old ones never really leave'?

Kendra: I think they are up with God.

Joe: The butterflies are up with God.

Michael: ...or the old ones.

Teacher: What is a soul?

Ben: It is, like, it is all your insides, all the stuff inside.

Michael: It's kind of like a muscle.

Ali: No, souls are your blood and your heart.

Ben: It's...

Michael: Kind of...

Ben: It's...your soul is the stuff that is inside your heart.

Teacher: What happens to your soul when you die?

Joe: It goes to...to somebody else...or to like, some where else. It leaves.

Kendra: Or, it gets cold.

Joe: I think I know what a soul is. It is what you do, everything that you do.

Kendra: The heart brings the soul into your body. If your heart stops, then...ah...

Joe: ...then your soul will go to somebody else.

Kendra...and the soul gets very cold and has to leave.

Teacher: So do butterflies have souls?

All: "Yes", "I think so"

Ben: But their wings don't.

Kendra: They carry the souls to God when the old people die.

The students here clearly push one another in their thinking. First, they ponder the meaning of the word soul. When Ben says a soul is “all your insides”, Michael takes a literal interpretation of this and adds that a soul is a “muscle”. When Ali introduces the word “heart” into the conversation, it refines how students are thinking about souls. They apply their new understanding of souls to the text and Kendra ends this thread by interpreting what that line means based on the definitions given by other students. There are many ways of deconstructing this transcript; there is a lot going on in these students' conversation. However, this passage flawlessly demonstrates students scaffolding and extending meaning for one another.

Student talk in literature discussion is generative. When students are in a position to initiate conversation through commenting and questioning, then they are exhibiting generative thinking. Generative refers to original thinking or speaking produced by students. When the teacher asks questions or initiates comments, as occurs in guided reading, then students' responses spring from the teachers' thinking. In literature discussion the ideas and concepts explored originate from the students. The generative nature of students' talk in literature discussion leads to longer periods of student expression. In guided reading, and to a lesser extent, morning read aloud, students' sentences are shorter in length. For each literacy event transcript, I took ten lines from students mid-way through the session, and averaged the number of words uttered in each sentence. On average, students' sentence length in read aloud was 6.1 words per comment or question uttered. In guided reading, students' sentence length was 2.6 words

per comment or question uttered. In literature discussion, students' sentence length was an average of 11 words per comment or question uttered. Thus, literature discussion allows for lengthy, generative talk.

In literature discussion students' talk positions them as being the knower in the conversation. They establish this in many ways. First, students volunteer information freely about the things they know. In LD Transcript 6 this is evident:

Michael: It is a really good [book]. But sad. Especially I like the illustrations, and, and look here it has bunch of butterflies on it.

Ali: They are monarchs.

Teacher: How do you know they are monarchs?

Joe: Who is it by and illustrated, I forgot....

Ali:because I studied them and so I know what they look like...

Michael: Yeah, who is it by?

Teacher: Well, the author is Barbara Joessey.

Kendra: Yeah, Barbara M. Joessey. Yeah.

Kendra: When we were studying....ummm...

Ali: Mexico?

Kendra:....authors, authors...ummm...around the world, I think. I mean authors, I did Barbara M. Joessey and I went to the library to get ALL the books by Barbara M. Joessey.

Michael volunteers his past opinion of the book and points out an especially nice illustration. Ali asserts her knowledge that these are not just ordinary butterflies, they are monarchs. And Kendra volunteers information about the author obtained in a past study. These are clearly confident knowledge holders.

Students further demonstrate that they are in a position of being the knower in literature discussion when they answer the questions their peers initiate. In LD Transcript 2, the following conversation occurred:

(Teacher reads...)

(Ends with “And we walk slowly searching...”)

Joe: That is a long wall.

Many: Yeah.

Ben: Is that the cemetery?

Michael: Yeah, I think it is.

Ali: Or is the Great Wall?

Many: No, no it’s not.

Ben: the Great Wall of China is made out of like, stones and brick.

Teacher: This is a different wall, isn’t it?

Michael: It’s not even close to China.

Teacher: Do you know where this one [wall] is?

Ben: Ms. Wilhoit has been to this place.

Kendra: Washington.

Joe comments on the length of the wall and his peers agree. When Ben asks if the wall is in a cemetery, it is Michael, not the teacher, who answers. And when Ali mistakes it for the Great Wall of China, it is the students who clarify this misunderstanding. Students frequently affirm peers’ positions and ideas. In LD Transcript 3 from *The Red Balloon* we see this confirmation:

Ali: They are trying to hurt the balloon.

Ben: Not the boy.

Ali: The balloon, not the boy.

Again, confirmation and extension of ideas in LD Transcript 4 from *Meet Danitra*

Brown:

Kendra: My mommy taught me this. If you're gonna tease me then I am not gonna be around you and walk away.

Michael: Yeah, walk away.

Ali: Because the other girl was going to punch her.

Kendra: "Cruising for a Bruising"

Ali: If they do something to you do not have to do something back.

Joe: They will get even madder if you just ignore them.

They each take turns affirming the lesson that Kendra's mother taught her.

In literature discussion students feel free to disagree with one another, and with the teacher. This is the only event where kindergarten students negate and disagree with what others in the event say. That students feel free to disagree in literature discussion further proves the finding that they are in the position of being knowers; yet it speaks to so much more. Disagreement indicates higher levels of thinking. In literature discussion disagreements were brief but pointed. Transcript LD 1 illustrates this:

Michael: I was right. They got the same kind of chair as before. I predicted it.

Ali: But it's not really the same one, it looks different.

Ali corrects Michael's notion that it is the same chair as before the fire. And from LD Transcript 3:

Teacher: Can brothers and sisters be friends, too?

Ben: They are supposed to be your best friends.

Joe: Yeah, in the whole wide world.

Kendra: Except, some people are different even if they are in the same family.

Kendra refuses to simply go along with what Ben and Joe suggest. Disagreement between students during literature discussion is a clear indication of critical thinking.

We see more evidence of disagreement in Transcript 6:

Joe: Where are the monsters?

Ben: I bet in the other, in the next picture coming up.

Ali: Probably the red things.

Kendra: No, those are hearts.

Students in literature discussion are constantly thinking about their peers' comments and actively interpret and evaluate what they hear. They understand the weight of the conversation will fall on their shoulders so they are always thinking about not only what the teacher says, but what their peers say as well.

Students use illustrations to extend meaning. Students notice many elements of story in literature discussion. Because students are so close to the text, they are very intimately involved in the illustrations. They heavily rely on illustrations to extend the meaning of the story. While we know that emergent readers commonly use illustrations for meaning, students in literature discussion are able to do this in a way that they aren't able to in read aloud because of their distance from the text. Here, they can examine illustrations up close and then discuss the meanings they uncover. In LD Transcript 1 we see students using illustrations to push their understanding:

Ali: Look (pointing to the illustration). Look how everyone is helping carry things in.

Ben: Yeah, look at that big table.

Kendra: And there is the stuffed bear that someone gave her.

Teacher: How do you think they are feeling about this whole thing?

Michael: Happy?

Ben: More like kind of happy, but kind of sad. You can see their faces

Joe: That their house burned down, but that they are getting stuff from friends.

Kendra: In-between. And look, they are getting a dog, so that is good.

Students refer back to the illustration three different times in this short passage. And in

LD Transcript 2 it is the illustration that brings the wall to life for Ali:

(Teacher reads...)

Ali: Oh, now I see them. I see the names on the wall. There are tons of them!

Michael: Do you think we can read them?

Ali: Yes. I can't read them right now, though, but I could if I were there.

The magnitude of how many lives were lost hits home when Ali can see them in front of her. Each transcript holds examples of students using the illustrations to deepen their comprehension.

Students make numerous connections in literature discussion. Students also frequently notice text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections. Text-to-text connections usually happened at the beginning of literature discussion when students recognized a familiar author. They commonly remembered an author they had studied, or how one book reminded them of another. It also happened when they connected what they were reading to content they had read in another book, usually from a content area study. LD Transcript 2 offers an example of this:

Ali: You know that book about Miss Sarah? That was a book of war, too.

Ben: That was the Japanese and Americans. Wasn't that World War II?

Another example of this can be found in Transcript 6:

Ali: When we studied Mexico, I saw pictures where there were babies in scarves, like that.

Teacher: Yeah, they carry them like that.

Michael: In Africa they do that, too.

Teacher: Do you remember when we studied, Day of the Dead? What happened?

Michael: They gave the dead food.

Kendra: They celebrate it in North Amer...I mean South America and we studied South America with Michael and Michael did Day of the Dead and we made this little coffin and I brought my skeleton costume.

Ali connects what she sees in the illustration of *Ghost Wings* to what she saw when she studied Mexico. Michael also pulls in what he learned from his studies of Africa. And finally, students pull from what they learned when they read about Day of the Dead in a previous content area study. Again, students' talk exemplifies how they are making critical connections.

Students made far more text-to-self connections. These students are closely tied to experiences that have happened to them in their own lives, and this comes up over and over in literature study. In fact, each transcript has evidence of students making personal connections. In LD Transcript, students make personal connections:

Teacher: Anything else you noticed? What is it like to have a fire?

Ben: Oh no, to lose all my stuff.

Ali: I only had a tornado.

Ben: If my brother lost his dog that my grandma gave him when he wasn't even born, he would cry. He would be so sad. He got it when he wasn't even born.

Joe: I wouldn't like to lose my frogs.

Ali: I have a tiny ballerina and a tiny bear and if I had a fire I wouldn't be able to find it.

Students are able to connect what losses they might experience if they were in a fire. Ali connects her tornado tragedy to the fire tragedy highlighted in the book. LD Transcript 4 offers another typical example of these text-to-self connections:

Kendra: I tell secrets to everyone.

Ali: Sometimes people say I won't tell but they do. That did happen to one of my friends.

Teacher: It doesn't make you feel good when your secret is told.

This comes after a poem from *Meet Danitra Brown* that describes her sadness when someone tells her secret. Kendra makes a very candid admission and Ali follows it a connection of her own. LD Transcript 6 demonstrates more student connections:

(Teacher reads...)

(Ends with, "When the tortillas were ready, we cooked them side by side")

Ben: I made, I made tortillas.

Ali: I have too.

Teacher: You have?

Ali: Yes...

Joe: Yummy

Ali: And when we made them we got them all over our hands.

Teacher: They are kind of messy.

Kendra: I love tortillas...

Michael: No they are not messy because we buy the kind that is already made.

Ali: I don't like them.

This discussion follows a part in the text where the little girl and her grandmother make tortillas. What is significant about this transcript is that all five members make a personal connection to the book. Connections are important because in order for students to connect they must first comprehend, then connect that comprehension to past experiences, encouraging synthesis. The image of cooking tortillas described in the text conjures up memories for all students; they actively conceptualize and evaluate the text to connect.

Finally, kindergarten students in literature discussion group also make text-to-world connections. This kind of connection is achieved when the book reminds students of something going on in the world around them. This did not happen as frequently as personal connections for students, but it is certainly evident. For example, see this passage from LD Transcript 1:

Ali: I wonder where her dad is? Maybe he got burned...

Ben: Maybe he died in the fire.

Ali: In the fire, but it didn't show.

Kendra: Or she just didn't have one.

Ali: Well she had to have one, if the mom had a baby. You couldn't just have no one and then have a baby.

Michael: Well, that is true.

Ali: But maybe just now she doesn't have one. My cousin used to have dad, but now she doesn't. And once her dog dragged in a dead possum. That reminds me of her dad because it happened when he was there. I don't remember his name though.

Kendra: Sometimes the dad...they...the mom has the baby and there is still a husband, but then they...what do you call that...when they break apart?

Teacher: Break apart?

Kendra: You know when you have a dad, but then suddenly you just have a mom.

Students here are making world connections about divorce in families. They are asking questions about the world they live in. Ali briefly connects on a personal level, but students keep it speculative about single parent families. These text-to-world connections are significant because they indicate students' ability to think beyond their own personal experiences and interpret the world around them. LD Transcript 2 offers another example of students connecting the text to world issues:

(Teacher finishes author's note)

Ben: If there are more than 58, 000 names on the wall, then that means that there are more than, 58,000 people who died.

Ali: Is this book old?

Ben: It might be in some ways because the wall is pretty old.

Kendra: This book is real.

Joe: Yeah, and all those people that died are real.

Ben: Maybe the author went to the wall and saw all the names and wrote this one down.

Ben's initial comment shows evidence of critical thinking—he is analyzing and synthesizing information. Additionally, students in this passage connect the events in the text to the reality of lives lost in war. This triggers concern about whether the book is real or not. Finally, this thread leads students to ponder how the idea for the book came to be.

All the connections students make to literature (text-to-text, text-to-self, text-to-world) indicate their ability to think critically. Critical thinking is the intellectual process

of “actively conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information” (p. 1, Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2004). When students are thinking critically they are not remaining passive, nor are they simply accepting everything they see and hear. They are thinking actively, making connections between the text and the events in their mind. They are asking questions about what they hear, evaluating, categorizing, finding relationships—making connections.

Students in literature discussion exhibit higher level thinking in literature discussion. They exhibit the kind of thinking skills that we know good readers use. In literature discussion, kindergarten students have the opportunity to hypothesize.

Remember from LD Transcript 1 when students debated the absent father:

Ali: I wonder where her dad is? Maybe he got burned...

Ben: Maybe he died in the fire.

Ali: In the fire, but it didn't show.

Kendra: Or she just didn't have one.

This is hypothetical thinking about *what if?* Hypothetical thinking is important because it demonstrates that students are engaged, comprehending and interpreting the text. In LD Transcript 2 from *The Wall*, students voice the following:

Ben: Some wars are just for no reason.

Kendra: Probably for, like, for America, we sometimes have a war to like, umm...

Ali: Well maybe they want it to get more money.

Kendra: Probably some people...

Ali: War is pretty hard though.

Kendra: If someone like, if um, if we um have a war that is to prove that we don't want our enemies near us.

Michael: Yeah, it is to keep the enemies away.

Joe: If there are blocks, like the enemies block things, then we can't get too much food.

Students hypothesize here about the reasons we might have wars. And Joe ends the conversation by hypothesizing about what the effect of war on us might be.

Students constantly interpret text to find meaning. Every time students initiate comments and questions after a passage, they are offering interpretation of what they just heard. Often, they dig deeper into a more literal interpretation. This kind of conversation was not uncommon. Another example of students interpreting text can be found in LD Transcript 2 from *The Wall*:

Teacher: Yes, that was different than this war; this is about the Vietnam War. What did the author, Eve Bunting mean when she said, "The Wall is for all of us"?

Kendra: Probably if you die in a war, then...

Ali: Or in training.

Kendra: Ok, so if you die in the war, the Washington D.C war, then someone has to make another whole thing of the wall and then write all those names on it.

Ben: I think we carve it out of stone.

Many: Yeah.

Ben: Yeah, like how they do it with Tombstones.

Here, students are interpreting the author's note. The teacher initiates this line of thinking, but students extend it and apply interpretation of the author's words.

Additionally, kindergarten students analyze and critique text, and display metacognitive thinking in literature discussion groups. They think deeply and critically about what the text really means, and they offer their opinions about that analysis. They

wonder about why the author does what he or she does, and they offer an opinion about their wonderings. Students cycle back to meanings they made earlier in the text, to confirm their thinking. In LD Transcript 1, Michael states, “I was right. They got the same kind of chair as before. I predicted it”. He cycles back to an earlier comment he made about the mother getting a new chair and confirms that his thinking was correct.

LD Transcript 2 shows another example of a cycle of confirming:

Teacher: That can be true. There are a lot of soldiers that they don't know if they died. They probably did, but they are not sure, so those names are on the wall, too.

(Teacher finishes author's note)

Ben: If there are more than 58, 000 names on the wall, then that means that there are more than, 58,000 people who died.

Later in this conversation, Kendra comes back to this notion, confirming her understanding of the wall:

Kendra: Ok, so if you die in the war, the Washington D.C war, then someone has to make another whole thing of the wall and then write all those names on it.

Kendra is stating her understanding that if soldiers die in the Iraq war (the “Washington D.C war”) then those names could also be added to a memorial wall.

These cycles frequently occurred. Students would discuss a notion early in the text and then address it again later. In LD Transcript 4, Joe addresses the media involved in the story, expressing his deep concern about the media:

Joe: Because they are just yelling “White for a day! White for a day!” a whole bunch of times. They are talking about white people and black people and all that stuff. They're saying a lot of bad words, like black people.

Ali: Well, it doesn't say any bad words in there.

Joe: I know, but they are yelling, “White for a day”. And that is not good.

Later in the conversation the teacher asks a question about dialogue in the book depicting the girl saying to her brother, “We have a right to be here, too.” The following interaction occurred:

Teacher: Why did she say that to her brother? We have a right to be here, too?

Kendra: Um, because...

Ben: It is right for them to be there, too.

Joe: Yeah, it is right for them to be in the world. It is not right for others to surround them and say “white for a day!”

Joe has connected the “white for a day” comment with injustice. He uses that phrase to make his point that all people have a right to be in the world.

It is also common for students to cycle back to meanings created in other areas of study. A short passage from LD Transcript 6, offers a clear example of this cycling:

Ali: When we studied Mexico, I saw pictures where there were babies in scarves, like that.

Teacher: Yeah, they carry them like that.

Michael: In Africa they do that, too.

Teacher: Do you remember when we studied, Day of the Dead? What happened?

Morgan: They gave the dead food.

Kendra: They celebrate it in North Amer...I mean South America and we studied South America with Michael and Michael did Day of the Dead and we made this little coffin and I brought my skeleton costume.

Teacher: That’s right. Let’s keep reading.

The illustrations in the text remind Ali of her content area study of Mexico. Likewise, Michael remembers a similar occurrence in Africa. Building on these cycles, the teacher

reminds the students of a whole class study of Day of the Dead. Helping students activate their knowledge of past studies enriches the reading experience.

Students in literature discussion edge into critical literacy. Ira Shor (1997) says that critical literacy begins by “questioning power relations, discourses, and identities in a world not yet finished, just, or humane” (n.pag). He goes on to assert that, “Critical literacy thus challenges the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths for self and social development” (n.pag). Kindergarten students in literature study have the potential to cross over into critical literacy. For example, see Transcript 2 from *The Wall*:

Michael: Yeah, it is to keep the enemies away.

Joe: If there are blocks, like the enemies block things, then we can't get too much food.

Teacher: Who is the enemy?

Kendra: The enemy is kind of like the war from a different country.

Ali: Like, what if there was Japanese in Columbia?

Ben: No, my mom is Japanese.

Teacher: Yes, your mom is half Japanese.

Kendra: My mom is half sign language.

Ben: Is half sign language?

Kendra: Yeah.

Ben: I know sign language.

Kendra: The enemy is a different country that is against us.

Joe: If the Americans are fighting Iraq, then...they are the enemy.

In this transcript, the teacher's question, "Who is the enemy?" takes students away from the text. Ali remembers from another book that the "enemy" in World War II was the Japanese, so she offers that. However, Ben rejects that because his mom is Japanese. The thread ends when students determine that an enemy is anyone against America. This is something they are comfortable with. Students are questioning and contemplating social identities and they have left the literal interpretation of the text to do so.

We can observe students edging over into critical literacy again in Transcript 3 from *The Red Balloon*:

Teacher: Do sometimes people do mean things for fame or for money?

All: Yeah.

Ben: Yeah, so they can be rich.

Ali: Like some people rob a bank, just so they can be rich.

Michael: Some people, some poor people want food so they like, rob from a store.

Ben: Not all poor people do that.

Teacher: Is it the same thing, in your opinion, for someone to steal food as it is for someone to rob a bank?

Joe: Not really.

Kendra: Kind of.

Joe: Because it's different. Because some people want money and some just want food. You have to have food or you die.

Ali: But money helps you buy food.

Joe: Money is not as important as food.

Ali: You can get food with money. But you might want food and not have enough money to get what you want.

Kendra: Actually, the particular reason is because some people have no food so, um and no home, so um they like, say, I know what I am going to do. I am going to steal some money in the night. And they have to.

Ben: Maybe the boy's whole family is poor.

Ali: Or maybe, it's like kids who hurt and kids who stole, they have a dad who tells them what to do and so they have to.

In this transcript students are questioning each other's assertions about what is right and wrong, and they question the social problem of poverty. These young students recognize that people have to eat and they are struggling to ascertain what actions are acceptable if they don't have food to eat. They are dealing with issues of morality that take them far beyond the text.

In LD Transcript 6 from, *Ghost Wings*, we see Ali asks a question to try to clarify what has actually happened in the text and what is a dream. The teacher makes the comment, "The dad says when you love someone they never really leave" which evokes a lengthy student conversation:

(teacher reads)

Ali: Was she telling us about her grandma when she died? Or was that real?

Ben: It was real. This picture is neat.

Kendra: After the grandmother died, then when the monsters came back, then her grandmother wouldn't be there to scare them away with her broom, and...da, da, da...next page!

Teacher: The dad says when you love someone they never really leave.

Ben: Because they stay.

Joe: Yeah, they are ghosts.

Kendra: Actually God...Like my baby sister, she is always next to me.

Teacher: Your sister that died? How is she next to you?

Kendra: Well, well if you just think and you remember about her that died, then you'll always have those memories and you'll think that she's right there with you.

Teacher: That is an interesting perspective....

Students leave the text to grapple with the notion of death. They are rejecting the permanence of death in favor of the idea that we can keep loved ones alive by remembering them. Kendra shares her personal experience with death and speaks with authority. Clearly students have left the text and are thinking about more worldly issues.

Students question identity in literature discussion. Students explore identity when they seek to place themselves in certain social spaces based on a group of defining characteristics (Johnston, 2004). Students explore identity in literature discussion when they use "I" in conversation, placing themselves in the story. They are exploring identity when they discuss their color, and who their parents are. We can see one clear example of their identity wonderings in LD Transcript 4:

Teacher: So, what is culture?

Ben: All people have their own culture.

Ali: It means that you have plays and stuff.

Teacher: What does she mean when she says culture goes better with jeans?

Ben: I do not think she knows...I think they have a book there...maybe it has something to do with that.

Teacher: All the arts and the things we love and who we are can be part of our culture.

Kendra: I have culture because I sing.

Joe: Do I have a culture?

Ali: Well, you are a different color.

Kendra: I think we all have a culture.

In this passage, students grapple with what it means to have culture and how it defines them. The teacher is more involved here as a member of the group. Students question themselves and who they are; they are beginning to place themselves in a social space. Exploring identity again represents students' explorations of critical literacy because they are thinking beyond the text; they have left the text to examine their places in their communities.

4) Literature Discussion Summary

The teacher in literature discussion is more of a facilitator than in other literacy events. She structures the session by reading aloud to students, and she promotes student thinking through her skillful use of open-ended questions and comments designed to provoke further thinking. She pulls back to allow students to open conversation threads and she encourages students to speak out simply by pausing. Her use of evaluative comments in literature discussion is rare.

In literature discussion students take an active role in directing the conversation. They initiate conversation threads through questions and comments. They are more generative, and they speak to each other, not just the teacher. In literature discussion, students have opportunities to be in positions of power. They too can be the knower and the one who answers questions. Their sentences are longer and they talk more here than in any other event. Students notice illustrations and make connections to the text. Yet they do so much more. Through talk, students exhibit understanding of hypothesizing, interpreting, analyzing, and critiquing text. They cycle back to assertions and meanings

made earlier in the session and they leave the text to discuss critical issues and explore identity.

Themes of Talk Across Literacy Events

The previous section detailed each literacy event in terms of protocol, the teacher's role in promoting and sustaining the event, and the children's participation. In this section, I answer the question, "How do the themes of talk that emerge differ among literacy events?" This section opens by examining the teacher in each literacy event in terms of the major themes that emerged from the data: 1) Initiating, 2) Questioning, 3) Responding, 4) Noticing & Naming, and 5) Knowing. Next, I unpack the children's talk in each event through the same themes. This section compares the major themes that emerged side by side in the literacy events.

The Teachers Talk across Literacy Events

Teachers approached each literacy event with an agenda, or a desired outcome. When we examine their talk in each event, this agenda becomes clearer. We can determine the literacy skills and strategies that they want students to focus on during the session. Additionally, we can observe how they promote thinking at different levels in each event. That is, the opportunities allowed for students to reflect and discuss literature.

Initiating

The question of who initiates discussion during the literacy events is an important one. Initiation during literacy events denotes a certain amount of control of the event. Due to the nature of young learners, the teacher was the major initiator of comments, questions and discussion threads in all three literacy events. In this sub-section I offer a

brief statement about the nature of teachers' initiations in each literacy event. However, this section is brief because teachers' initiations are flushed out more fully in the following sub section titled 'questioning' due to the fact that most of the initiations were in the form of questions.

The teacher initiated the read aloud session by stating the title and the author of the read aloud text. Every read aloud session includes the teacher's comment, "Today we are going to read...." After the opening statement of introduction, initiations occurred most frequently in the form of questioning. Occasionally, students were questioned at the beginning of the read aloud session to encourage them to establish background or to make connections. One of the main learning outcomes determined by the teachers for read aloud is that students comprehend the story. Therefore, teachers often initiated questions or comments to spot check that students were following and understanding the story line. This happened again at the end of the read aloud session to ensure that comprehension was maintained.

In guided reading, questioning was again the main type of teacher initiation. Teachers questioned students in the beginning of the session to elicit the title and predictions and inferences about the content of the book. If a book walk was included in the session, it was guided by questioning designed to help students identify the content of the text for more successful reading. The duration of the guided reading session was made up of a combination of teacher statements and questions designed to point out reading skills and strategies. For example in GR Transcript 1, Becky makes comments such as, "Everyone use your fingers" to focus students on using finger tracking to help with one-to-one correspondence. She also makes statements such as "Does that make

sense?” to focus students on comprehension. When teachers issue statements during guided reading, they do so to focus students’ attention to features of text, patterns of text, or specific reading skills and strategies. For example, in Transcript 4, Regina makes the statement “There is something about this book that makes it really interesting and kind of easy to read....see what you notice”. This initiation helps students become active readers. And in Transcript 6, she makes the statement, “What is hard about this word is it has a ‘g’ and an ‘h’ in it....these sounds are silent”. Statements like this help students hone their phonological skills. At the end of guided reading, teachers initiate comments or questions for two reasons: 1) to check that comprehension was achieved, and 2) to restate the skill or strategy that on the guided reading agenda.

In literature discussion, the teacher initiated less often than she did in read aloud and guided reading. It could be argued that she initiated conversation by pausing during the reading, or by letting students’ questions hang until they were picked up by other students. However, verbal initiation was more infrequent here. When she did initiate, it was to point out a comment she herself thought, or to ask open-ended questions designed to provoke student thinking and conversation.

Questioning

In read aloud the teacher most commonly initiates in the form of questioning, using both open and closed-ended questions to clarify plot, and to help students make connections. The following excerpt from RA Transcript 2 offers a good example of this:

Teacher: Does this story remind anyone of any other stories?

Student: No

Michael: It reminds me of uh...the one we read yesterday. *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs.*

Teacher: Why does it remind you of that one?

Michael: Because it had a fox in it.

Student: No, it had a wolf in it.

Teacher: Did the wolf remind you of the fox?

Michael: Yes.

Teacher: Student?

Student: The fox and the wolf are kind of the same because in that story, the wolf wanted to eat the pigs, and it might be the same. The fox might want to eat Flossie or get her basket.

The goal of read aloud established by teachers is that students enjoy and comprehend the text. Therefore they refrain from provoking students into long discussions. Often, their questions are designed simply to ensure comprehension was reached. For example in RA Transcript 3 we see this:

Teacher: Why do you all think they're happiest here?

Ben: Because it is so quiet and peaceful.

Student: The whole world wouldn't actually be asleep because of the time change.

Teacher: Well that is true. So does this really mean the whole world? It might just seem that way to the paper boy. Student?

Student: And there are probably other paper boys, or paper girls, out, too.

Teacher: You are right. That is a good observation.

Here the teacher is questioning students to make sure they understand, and she praises them when she feels assured that the outcome is being met.

In guided reading, the teacher questioned to point out text features and to make sure her teaching point was being assimilated by students. Teachers in guided reading

asked closed-ended questions, and the talk moved quickly. For example in GR Transcript 5, Becky questions to promote students understandings of conventions by asking a closed question:

Teacher: But look at what the title ends with. It ends with an exclamation point. What does that tell you?

Joe: (in a loud voice) “Smile, said dad!”

And in GR Transcript 4 we see Regina questioning to direct students to attend to features of print:

Teacher: Why do you think that word looks a little different?

Student: Oh, because it was a whack...now I forget.

Alexadnria: It’s in...in....Italics.

Reading italics with expression was a teaching point in this session and therefore questions were asked to determine if students understood.

In literature discussion the questioning was vastly different. Here, teachers strategically placed open-ended questions to promote students’ deeper thinking about the text. There is no right or wrong answer, and the teachers use questions sporadically to allow students to direct the conversation if they wish to do so. An example of this can be found in LD Transcript 6:

Teacher: What is important about that butterfly being there? Is it important?

Michael: They are coming back.

Joe: The butterflies are coming back.

Michael: They are coming back.

Joe: I got a comment. When the butterflies came back, that’s when she remembered.

Teacher: Why?

Michael: Because remember way back in the book, they said the butterflies carried the old ones' souls.

Ben: My great-great grandmother is still alive.

Ali: My dad's friend, her mom, she is not alive, but she was 102 when she died.

Kendra:when the butterflies came, she remembered her grandma and that felt special.

Michael: Memories don't last forever. Because I don't remember much about being little.

Kendra: I remember one song that said 'taking pictures is making memories'.

In this passage, the teacher asks two open-ended questions. One to open the thread (What is important about that butterfly being there?), and one to sustain it (Why?). Otherwise, she fades out and lets the students drive the conversation.

Responding

In read aloud the teacher responds to students when they make comments or when they ask questions. She often comments by saying such phrases as, "Hmm...Interesting", or "We'll see" to acknowledge to students that their comments have been heard. In doing so, she keeps them thinking and searching for validation in the text. When students ask questions, the teacher is the one to answer. RA Transcript 4 offers a very clear example of how teachers respond to student questions:

(teacher reads... "knowing he had eluded his pursuers.")

Ali: What does that mean?

Teacher: It means he got away.

Student: What's that?

Teacher: It's a deer.

Student: Why did the people follow a deer?

Ali: (interrupting) That picture is so neat.

Teacher: They thought the deer was him....

The teacher answers students' questions because she wants to ensure they understand, while at the same time, moves the literacy event along quickly.

In guided reading, the teacher responds with evaluation when students make comments or ask questions. This is evident in GR Transcript 2:

Alex: We knew that word because it was already in there.

Teacher: You are right, you already saw that word.

(all read...)

Teacher: What do you notice about every page? What is the only thing that changes?

Ellie: The animals...

Joe: and the pictures.

Teacher: Yes, the animals and the pictures. And the animal is the only word that changes in each new sentence, isn't it? Ok, ready?

Because teachers are asking closed-ended questions, there is naturally a right or wrong answer.

In literature discussion the teacher uses frequent pauses to respond to students; she responds to student comments with further questioning, and she responds simply by returning to the text. LD Transcript 4 offers a typical example of this:

Teacher: This one is called "My Mom and Me"

(pause after title)

Ali: She does not have purple on in this picture. She only has one piece of purple on.

Joe: Sometimes it is dad and me only.

Kendra: Sometimes me and my uncle have Kendra and uncle time.

Teacher: Is that the same thing?

Ben: Maybe they got divorced. So now the dad isn't there.

Joe: I think it means the dad is never there.

Kendra: I watch the show *Rudy*, and the mom got stuck in a hot air balloon and I think that might have happened to the dad. In the show, the dad had to be mom and dad and maybe that is what happened to her.

Teacher: What is divorce?

Ben: That is when your parents just can't work it out. They break.

Teacher: Let's read...

Rather than responding to students by saying yes or no to their ideas, she simply leads them into further thinking by responding with a question. At the end, rather than respond with an idea of her own, the teacher moves back into reading. This leaves open the possibility of further discussion of this topic.

Noticing and Naming

Noticing occurs when the teacher states what is seen, notices what is important and brings children's thinking about the text to conscious awareness. Peter Johnston (2004) states that noticing and naming is "crucial to becoming capable in particular activities" and that teachers and students "have to figure out the key features of the activity and their significance" (p. 11). When students and teachers notice and name concepts in literacy events, they are acknowledging their importance; they are bringing their thinking about reading to a metacognitive level.

In read aloud, teachers notice text-to-text opportunities; they notice important themes and plot events in the text; and they notice illustrations. RA Transcript 1 illustrates the many ways in which teachers notice the text in read aloud:

Teacher: What other book did we read about this?

Many voices: *Ruby Bridges!*

Teacher: Do you see what is happening?

Student: The black people are showing the white people that they should have rights too.

Teacher: And also...

Student: They are resisting.

Teacher: They are resisting because there was so much hurt and they tried to be heard, didn't they?

And later in the same transcript:

Teacher: We talked about this in *Ruby Bridges*, how she had to walk behind the crowds.

(teacher reads...)

Teacher: The sign says, "End lunch counter discrimination" and see they are eating at the counter in this café.

The teacher is noticing and naming the concepts and text features that she wants students to notice; she is modeling what is important to read aloud. Her noticings point to the illustrations, point to the importance of making connections and point to the importance of understanding major concepts. Teachers also make it a point to notice the author's craft in read aloud.

In guided reading, teachers notice and name the strategies students are using to decode text, they notice features of print, and they notice how students work these strategies out. For example in GR Transcript 2:

Teacher: Did you see that on this page? And inside the log the fungi looks like...

Student: Mushrooms.

Teacher: On the outside it looks like mushrooms, but on the inside it looks like what? Look on the page, it tells you.

(long pause)

Teacher: This word right here on the middle of the page. It starts with a “sp”.

Here the teacher directs students’ attention to visual information to access the sounding out strategy. And from GR Transcript 3, we see that the teacher notices strategies for successful reading such as using one-to-one correspondence:

Teacher: Yes that’s right. Ok, let’s start from the beginning. (Joe draws attention back to picture and says something). Oh, I see. Ok, are we ready? Turn back to the beginning. Point to the words with your fingers.

And in GR Transcript 4 remember that the teacher notices the pattern in the text:

Teacher: There is something about this book that makes it really interesting, and kind of easy to read. So I want you all to read to yourselves. Read three pages and then stop there and see what you notice about this book. Ok...

(all read...)

Teacher: Any ideas what makes this book easy to read?

Student: Because it has short lines and short words.

Teacher: Ok.

Student: And the words are easy and short.

Teacher: Ok. I don’t think you’ve noticed it yet...

Students focus on what is happening in the text directly in front of them because the teacher's talk focuses them on skills and strategies, thus students do not extend.

In literature discussion, the teacher notices and models meaning beyond literal interpretation. Her initiations serve to show students how to notice concepts beyond literal interpretation. For example, LD Transcript 3 offers an example of this:

Teacher: I wondered that there are no parents involved in this story.

Joe: Yeah.

Ben: They didn't talk about any grown-ups much.

Regina notes that the story left out discussion of parents. By making this comment she is urging students to go beyond the text and think about why the author might have written about the children only. Teachers also notice lines of the text that offer more to think about. It is very common in literature discussion for the teacher to re-read a word, a line or a passage to encourage student to think more about deeply about the meaning.

Knowing

The term *knowing* refers to who is in the position to answer questions and make comments—the person in a position of power (Johnston, 2004). When teachers act as the knower they direct the conversation. In read aloud, the teacher is in the main position of power. She has the knowledge necessary to direct the conversation, and to answer questions as they arise. RA Transcript 3 illustrates the teacher as the knower:

Teacher: Why do you think we might be reading the Paper Boy this morning? Raise your hand and tell me why...

Student: Because we are studying newspapers now.

Teacher: You are right, and today we are going to visit the Tribune. So, the paper boy. Are there such things as paper boys? Is this a real job?

All: Yes, (general agreement)

Teacher: This is by David Pilkey. What else did he write?

By asking students to raise their hands, the teacher is the only one who has permission to speak freely. By asking the questions and evaluating the responses, the teacher cements her position as the knower. Revisiting RA Transcript 4 illustrates this:

(teacher reads... “knowing he had eluded his pursuers.”)

Ali: What does that mean?

Teacher: It means he got away.

Student: What’s that?

Teacher: It’s a deer.

This transcript highlights the teacher as the one with the knowledge. Students accept this and do not talk to each other in read aloud; they talk to the teacher.

In guided reading the teacher is even more firmly entrenched as the knower. GR Transcript 2 illustrates this position of power:

Teacher: And it makes the wood soft. What is a word that means soft and it starts with a *D* on this page?

Alexandria: Drilling?

Teacher: It wasn’t drilling, look at your book; it’s the last word on the page. Do you know what that word is?

By directing the students to return to the text, and by asking the questions, the teacher puts herself in the position of knowing more. This passage from GR Transcript 6 demonstrates how the teacher is clearly the knower in this event:

Teacher: Yes. Can anyone see the rhyming in the next passage? Let’s read it together and see what we can find.

(read aloud together)

Teacher: What words rhymed?

Kendra: Everywhere and swinging.

Student: No, chattering and everywhere (fades out)

Teacher: Ok, let me read it to you. Listen...

(teacher reads aloud)

Kendra: hippo and hole

Teacher: No. Those start with the same letter. It is *Lair* and *Where*. Do you see that?

All: Oh, yeah...

Teacher: So see where the rhyming words are placed in the first two passages? Now where do you think you can find rhyming words in the last passage?

Student: Right here and here!

Teacher: How did you know?

Student: Because of where they were before.

Clearly the teacher is leading this stilted discussion. Students talk to the teacher, not to each other because the teacher is the one who knows. She directs students' observations, affirms or denies students' comments, and controls the content of student talk through her line of questioning.

The teacher is less frequently a knower in literature discussion. Rather, the position of knower in literature discussion is shared by students and teachers. The teacher deliberately takes herself out of the conversation at times, to allow students to experience this position as well. In the beginning, the teacher starts out as the knower. LD Transcript 2 shows this typical commencement:

Teacher: This book is called *A Chair for my Mother*. Have any of you read this before?

(a mix of no's and yes's)

Teacher: Some of you have and some haven't. That's great, some of you will think about it for the first time, and some of you can revisit your old thoughts. This is a good one. It says in the dedication, "To the memory of my mother".

Otherwise, the teacher acts as a knower in this event when she shares her ideas, implements reading, and asks open-ended questions.

The Students' Talk across Literacy Events

Student talk in each event was influenced by the task outlined by the teacher.

Students adopted the literacy role or stance determined by the way the teacher structured and guided the event. Looking at each literacy event in terms of the themes of talk that emerged from data analysis illustrates students' developing literacy skills and strategies. Additionally, we can observe students' thinking and reflection about literature and literacy by analyzing their talk.

Initiating

In read aloud students were not likely to initiate conversation. They understood this to be the teacher's role; however, there were occasional exceptions. When kindergarten students initiated a comment or question in read aloud it was almost invariably about an illustration or to clarify a word's meaning. In RA Transcript 1 we see a very common student initiation:

(teacher reads...)

Ben: That is the same picture that is on the cover.

Teacher: Really? Yes, that is true.

(teacher reads...)

Teacher: What's happening over here?

Kindergarten students can easily access illustrations, and therefore, this is an approachable way for these young students to enter into the conversation. In RA Transcript 4 from *Barefoot: The Underground Railroad* (1999), by Pamela Duncan Edwards, we see this again:

Teacher: Today we are reading *Barefoot: The Underground Railroad* for read aloud and it is by Pamela Duncan Edwards, illustrated by Henry Cole.

(teacher reads...)

Kendra: Its not really pictures...The pictures are dark...

Student: I can barely see his feet.

Student: Yeah but you can see animals in the picture.

Kendra: I can see his feet and his clothes.

(teacher reads...)

Again, we see how students initiate talk the centers on the illustrations. Students in read aloud understand that their main role is to listen, comprehend, and enjoy. The intermittent conversation can enhance this experience for the children, but talk is not the main outcome in this literacy event.

In guided reading the instances of student initiated talk are rare. The pattern of questioning established by the teacher places the student firmly in the role of the respondent. Students in guided reading answer teachers' questions, and if they do initiate a comment, teachers often let it hang unless it addresses the teaching focus for the guided reading, or another reading skill or strategy. In GR Transcript 5 we see how students attempt to initiate discussion about the front illustration:

Teacher: What is this title?

Kendra: *Rumble in the Jungle*. Those words rhyme!

Teacher: Yes, *Rumble in the Jungle*, and those words do sound similar, don't they?

Kendra: Rumble, Jungle.

Student: I think I see a...I think horses are going to be in here.

Ali: Zebra.

Teacher: Ok, I don't know if we can read this whole book together, but we'll see. I want you just to start out by reading this first page, and then stop.

The teacher begins by asking for the title and then confirms the answer, and jumps into the teaching point. When two students initiate predictions about the types of animals they might encounter in the text, the teacher squelches the conversation thread. Thus students learn their initiations are not relevant to teaching point of the literacy event.

In literature discussion students frequently initiated talk. They initiated talk using a combination of questions and comments. In LD Transcript 3 we see a common example of student initiation by way of comment:

(Teacher reads...)

(Ends with, "The balloon followed him")

Ali: Oh! It's magic!

Kendra: Or it's a servant.

Teacher: A servant? Do you think the balloon is a servant?

Joe: It could be.

Ben: Maybe it is a dog following him.

Kendra: A balloon dog, yeah!

Ali initiates a comment that she is very excited about—she initiates to share with the group what she has figured out about the balloon. Other students pick up on her initiation and follow the thread to its conclusion. And in LD Transcript 5 we see a student initiate with a question:

Michael: What does outnumbered mean?

Joe: It means they had more people than they did.

Teacher: So why does grandma say that?

Joe: Because the other boys were bigger and they had more of them

Michael initiated a question to clarify unfamiliar vocabulary, and a student answered his query. It is interesting to note that students' initiations were more frequently in the form of a statement or comment. They do ask questions in literature discussion; however, students' questions in literature discussion are more closed-ended. Only on a few occasions did students ask open-ended questions. Open-ended questioning, designed to evoke thought and conversation, denotes higher level thinking. This did happen on occasion, however.

Questioning

Questions were often posed in the form of an initiation as stated earlier, however, the content of students' questions bear further explanation. In read aloud, the content of the questions kindergarten students asked dealt either with the illustrations, vocabulary, or clarified meaning. In RA Transcript 1 we see the following:

Ben: What does that say? (pointing to picture)

Teacher: It says "Daniel Colored Public School".

(teacher reads...)

Ben seeks more information about an illustration to enhance the meanings he is creating.

The teacher offers the information, and then returns to the reading. Revisiting RA

Transcript 4 illustrates another type of questioning:

Ali: What does that mean?

Teacher: It means he got away.

Student: What's that?

Teacher: It's a deer.

Student: Why did the people follow a deer?

(background whispering...)

Ali: That picture is so neat.

Teacher: They thought the deer was him, and the deer...

This is a good example of how students question in read aloud. Ali asks a question intended to clarify the meaning of the reading. The teacher answers and then another kindergarten student not involved in the case, questions to get more information about a picture that is hard to see. When she gets that information it sparks another query. Ali makes a side note about the illustration that is not followed up on.

Students in guided reading asked few questions, typically an average of 2-3 questions per event. When questions did occur they were either guesses at words or procedural. For example, one student asks "Where do we stop reading?" and in another transcript a student asks, "Do we read the whole book?" If students questioned for anything other than requesting procedural information, it typically happened during the book walk, not the main guided reading session. The teacher is firmly entrenched in the role of questioner in these sessions.

In literature discussion students question to clarify meaning, draw attention to illustrations, and event to evoke conversation. Remember from LD Transcript 2:

(Teacher reads...)

(Ends with “And we walk slowly searching...”)

Joe: That is a long wall.

Many: Yeah.

Ben: Is that the cemetery?

Michael: Yeah, I think it is.

Ali: Or is the Great Wall?

Many: No, no it’s not.

In this excerpt Ben and Ali pose questions to try to understand the wall better, and to try to reconcile it with places that are already familiar to them. They seek to clarify meaning. And LD Transcript 3 illustrates another example of student questioning for meaning:

(Teacher reads...)

Ali: Did his balloon get hit?

Ben: Yeah, see there. It popped.

Ali is drawing from both the text and the illustrations to pose this question. And in LD Transcript 5:

(Teacher reads)

Ali: Can I see the poem?

Joe: Will you read the whole book?

Teacher: Yes...

Ali: Who was he mean to?

Joe: The girls, her (pointing to illustration)

Ben: I think both of the girls.

This transcript shows three questions. The first from Ali shows that she is interested in how the text is structured. The second question from Joe is simply procedural—he notes the book is broken into poems and he understands that one does not have to read the entire book. The third question from Ali, “Who was he mean to?” is designed to both clarify meaning and prompt student talk.

Responding

In read aloud students respond to the teacher’s questions and comments. RA

Transcript 6 shows a clear example of this:

Teacher: Today we are going to read *The Day of Ahmed’s Secret*. Can you tell where this story takes place by looking at the illustration on the cover?

Student: The way the people dress make it look like the people are from the middle east.

Teacher: What might this story be about?

Ben: I don’t know probably about his family.

The students’ talk is in direct response to the kinds of questions that the teacher asks to elicit background thinking about the text. And later in that same transcript:

(teacher reads...)

Teacher: How old do you think Ahmed is?

Student: Nine.

Michael: I think maybe 12.

Ali: Probably nine because he can go outside alone.

(teacher reads...)

Again, students' responses stem from teacher questioning. In read aloud, however, students will respond to each other as well if the talk takes them in that direction. It is usually initiated by the teacher, but it can turn from teacher to student into teacher to student to student as seen in the transcript above. Students' comments still reference the teacher's initial question. Students' responses show signs of critical thinking.

In guided reading, students respond to the teachers' comments about the text, due to the adjacency pair relationship in the event. They rarely respond to each other. GR

Transcript 5 offers a classic example of this characteristic of student talk:

Teacher: That word sounds like dad, but it starts with a /b/ (sounding the *ba* sound).

Joe: Bad!

Teacher: Yes, "too bad!"

(all read...)
("I'll have to try again")

Teacher: So is that why those two are only in that picture?

Ben: Oh wait, I see...See he is smiling but he has to change the picture.

Teacher: You're right...Let's go on...

Students answer in response to the teacher's question and direction. In guided reading, students are willing to go where the teacher leads them in their responses.

In literature discussion students respond to each other and to the teacher. LD Transcript 4 illustrates a common example of this dynamic interaction:

Kendra: Well that was a long poem. Purple is the color of royalty.

Joe: The poem is all about Danitra...

Kendra: and her favorite color, purple.

(Teacher reads)

Ben: That was short.

Teacher: Have you ever had to take care of the house?

Ben: When my dad was feeling sick I had to clean and help out

Kendra: I had to once...when my mom went to work, I was all alone and my mom was pregnant and I had to clean the house get things for my mommy to make her feel better.

Ali: When my mom...one time my mom and dad were sick and my sister was little, and I had to tell her what to do, and she put them in the play box and picked up the room.

Michael: I had to wash the dishes and clean up my room and make the beds.

Ben: You are the man of the house! (All laugh)

In the first part, Kendra makes a comment and the others respond to it. After the second reading, Ben makes another comment, but the real response of this second part comes after the teacher asks a question to elicit personal information. All students respond appropriately. Ben ends the session with humor. In literature discussion, students respond to the teacher, but they don't hesitate to make the conversation their own, and they share in the responsibility of initiating and responding.

Noticing & Naming

Students demonstrate in read aloud that they question and comment on the topics they notice: authors, illustrations, unfamiliar vocabulary, plot, and so on. In RA Transcript 2 we see students noticing and naming these concepts:

Lexi: We read another book by this author.

Teacher: What book did we read that was also by this writer?

Ali: *Christmas in the Big House*.

Teacher: Yes, that is the same author. That is a nice observation.

(teacher reads....)

Kendra: What does *critter* mean?

Teacher: It is kind of little animal. Another way of saying animal.

And later from the same transcript:

(teacher reads....)

Student: This is a made up story.

(teacher reads....)

Joe: He's a dog. And foxes are dogs.

Teacher: You think foxes are dogs?

Student: Actually, foxes are cousins to dogs.

(some laugh, some say no)

Teacher: Ali?

Ali: I think he looks like a dog, but I think he's not because he has sharper teeth.

Teacher: Kendra?

Kendra: I think it is just a dog in a costume.

In this longer transcript we see how students notice text-to-text connections, and recognize authors by name. We see how Kendra notices unfamiliar vocabulary and seeks clarification for her confusion. And in the last part of this transcript we see how students notice and name fiction literature, and finally how they notice the confusion that might exist about this character, central to the plot of this story.

In guided reading students notice features of text and name their strategies. GR Transcript 3 shows an example of students' noticings:

Teacher: How did you know that word was zoomed?

Joe: z—z—z—z I knew it started with the zzz sound.

(all read)
("And then the trolley zoomed off!")

Student: We knew that word because it was already in there.

Teacher: You are right, you already saw that word.

(all read...)

Teacher: What do you notice about every page? What is the only thing that changes?

Ben: The animals...

Joe: and the pictures.

Teacher: The animals and the pictures. And the animal is the only word that changes in each new sentence, isn't it?

Students here notice and articulate their word attack strategies. They notice familiar words and are able to apply their knowledge of that word in new situations. Finally, they notice the illustrations and use the information they gather there to answer the teacher's question and to decode the text. This excerpt is representative of the kinds of things students noticed in guided reading.

In literature discussion students notice numerous aspects of texts. They notice illustrations, vocabulary, connection, critical issues, deeper meaning and explore identity.

LD Transcript 5 demonstrates the kinds of things students notice in literature discussion:

Joe: Look, there that one is laughing (pointing to illustration).

Teacher: What were the newspaper people doing there?

Ben: The newspapers are always there. They are talking to someone about what happened.

Ali: ...trying to get the bad guys.

Joe: I see police.

Ben: Maybe the police are going to arrest the people who did this to them.

Kendra: And some people are recording, um, they are recording what the victims said.

And later:

Ben: The police is black.

Michael: No the police is white.

Joe: No, the police has my kind of skin. Kind of blackish, whitish.

Kendra: Kind of tann-ish.

Ben: Like mine.

Ali: Yours is way darker than mine.

Teacher: What do you think the police thinking about?

Joe: He thinks it's mean.

Ben: I can see....the police man looks sad.

This is just one example of students' noticings in literature discussion. Joe begins by noticing something in the illustration that he thinks worthy of discussion. After the teacher asks a question about his noticing, students go on to comment on and name how media works in our society. And later, students notice the illustrations again in reference to the color of the policemen. This is significant because the text being discussed, *Whitewash*, dealt with issues of race. Students go on to try to name their identity through the color of their own skin. Finally, the teacher asks a question designed to encourage students to notice deeper meanings, which they do in the last two lines. They add their interpretation.

Knowing

In read aloud and guided reading the students are not in the position of being knowers; they do not see themselves as having agency, sharing in control of the event. Though they can voice comments or ask questions in read aloud and to a much lesser extent, guided reading, it is not their main role in the literacy event. Furthermore neither read aloud nor guided reading places students in the position of having answers or sparking conversation—that is not the purpose designated by the teacher for those two events. There may be glimpses of it as students carry over their role from literature discussion (return to the conversation in RA Transcript 2 when students debated whether the character was a dog or a fox) but in no way is the student consistently the knower in these two events.

In literature discussion students have opportunities to be the knowers. They initiate, answer question posed by peers and disagree with one another. See LD Transcript 1 for evidence of the student as the knower:

Michael: I was right. They got the same kind of chair as before. I predicted it.

Ali: But it's not really the same one. It looks different.

(teacher reads...)

Ali: I like the face on there.

Teacher: The what?

Ali: The face of the mom. She looks happy.

Joe: This book was good.

Teacher: Can you tell me why?

Michael: I liked it when...

Ali: The house burned down.

Ben: It was kind of sad when the house burned down.

Kendra: I didn't like it, but then I did like it when they got all the new furniture.

Ali: In the back, it is neat because of that picture. The mom looks like my mom.

Josh: On the page before...she looks like a witch.

Allison: Not on that page.

This transcript opens with Michael affirming an earlier prediction. Ali is quick to correct his supposition. The teacher reads again, and it is Ali who initiates a comment expressing her impression of the illustrations and expecting a response from her peers. Joe turns the conversation with a critique endorsing the book. At the teacher's urging the students go on to analyze the parts of the book that resonate with them, and Ali returns to the illustration to get her point across that the illustration she noted reminds her of her mother. This excerpt clearly illustrates that the conversation is theirs to direct in both form and content.

A Window into Children's Literacy Meaning Making

This section answers the question, "How does the talk in each event provide a window into students' thinking and meaning making?" This question attempts to determine what the participants know about literacy as evidenced by their talk in read aloud, guided reading and literature discussion. This is an important criterion to establish because it provides teachers with information about the effectiveness of their pedagogical strategies, and allows teachers to assess their students' literacy understandings.

As five and six-year-olds these children are in the emergent literacy phase of development. Sulzby (1989) defines emergent literacy as the behaviors of reading and

writing that come before the development of conventional literacy. Research on emergent literacy suggests that there are links between what children know about language, reading and writing as early learners and their literacy development as older, independent readers (Clay, 1966). Emergent readers begin to understand and exhibit literacy concepts such as directionality, one to one correspondence, concepts of print, oral language, phonemic awareness; they are beginning to attend to print and apply graphophonic knowledge in order to read, beginning and ending letters to decode new words, and they begin to use meaning cues, grammatical cues, and prior knowledge to read (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). And according to Teale & Sulzby (1986) it is as important for young readers to know that reading equals meaning as it is for them to understand forms of literacy, such as specific letter names. Children garner written language knowledge essential for reading as they interact with adults in literacy experiences and as they observe the literacy activities of those around them. These understandings about what emergent readers know are important as we look at children's talk during read aloud, guided reading and literature discussion.

In read aloud, students listened to the teacher read a new book each day. Examining the nature of talk for kindergarten students in read aloud offers insights about the meanings they make about reading during this event. Students make text-to-text connections in read aloud. Often students remarked on stories that had familiar plot lines, stories from the same genre, or other books by the same author or illustrator. This helped students gain insights about the text, deepening their understanding. Students commented on and questioned the plot, characters and setting in read aloud. By talking about these concepts, students demonstrate they understand that elements of story are an

important part of meaning-making. Students commonly remarked on text illustrations, using the pictures to gather more information about the story and to deepen understanding. When students encountered unfamiliar vocabulary during the read aloud, they often stopped to ask for clarification, indicating they are monitoring for comprehension. And finally, students made intermittent predictions, interpretations and personal connections about the text. This was evidenced by student talk when they hypothesized about what might occur in the story, when they discussed characters' intentions, and when they shared personal stories evoked by text occurrences. All of these reading skills and understandings are important to reading.

Guided reading offers students literacy acquisition skills and understandings of a different kind. In the beginning of the guided reading session, the teachers' questioning prompted students to make brief predictions about what the story will be about. Students gave one sentence predictions before moving into reading. Predictions are important for establishing background for early readers. When students participated in a book walk, the opportunities for predictions and hypothesizing increased. Students' talk in guided reading demonstrated their engagement with features and patterns of text. When students talked about such concepts as punctuation, italics, titles, headings, chapters, and poem versus narrative structures, they were demonstrating their knowledge of text features. Having knowledge of text features helps students understand the content of the story, and how to read the text with greater fluency. When students talked about rhyming words, word families, and repetitive text, they demonstrate their knowledge of patterns of text; this again helps students be more successful independent readers. The majority of student talk in guided reading evidenced their growing knowledge of decoding strategies.

Students focused mostly on the sounding out strategy, though they also looked at context and syntactic information to decode. Finally, students talked about their own reading, discussing how they knew what they knew, demonstrating metacognitive awareness of themselves as readers.

Finally, the knowledge about reading that students strengthened in literature discussion differed from that of read aloud and guided reading. The texts chosen for literature discussion exposed students to a variety of genres and topics. Students gained knowledge about different types of text, evidenced by the content of their talk. Students discussed topics that many would consider beyond kindergarten children's ability and they made text-to-text connections and comparisons. Students in literature discussion also monitored for meaning; students' talk evidenced monitoring when they asked questions to clarify plot or vocabulary, when they remarked on elements of story, and when they confirmed their thinking. In literature discussion, students validated their understanding that good readers get meaning from the text and from the illustrations. This was evident by how often and how deeply students discussed the illustrations; discussions that greatly extended students' comprehension. Students expanded their vocabulary, and their talk demonstrated both vocabulary growth and the understanding that vocabulary is important in comprehending texts. Additionally, students talk showed that they were able to make connections from literature discussion text to other texts, to their personal lives, and to the world around them. When students talked in the form of connections, they demonstrated critical thinking; connections offered evidence that students were evaluating, analyzing, synthesizing and interpreting text—all strategies of strong readers. Students' comments in literature discussion were generative; ideas were

not given to them by the teacher. Generative evidenced that students comprehend. Furthermore, literature discussion allowed students the most opportunities for hypothesizing and predicting; students often cycled back to their hypotheses demonstrating the ability to reflect and carry meaning over extended periods of time. Finally, students’ talk demonstrated their engagement with critical literacy; they explored issues of identity, and they were able to leave the literal interpretation of the text to explore deeper societal issues. All of these benefits of literature discussion engaged students in the strategies and behaviors of good readers.

The table below helps visualize the range of skills, strategies and behaviors that the kindergarten students explored in these three literacy events.

Table 4: Corresponding Literacy Event and Reading Skills Acquired

Literacy Event	Reading Skills and Understandings Acquired
Read Aloud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Text to text connections ● Elements of Story ● Illustrations ● Vocabulary ● Monitoring for Comprehension ● Some predictions, interpretations and personal connections
Guided Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Patterns of Text ● Features of Text ● Decoding Strategies ● Metacognitive Strategies ● Some predicting based on illustrations
Literature Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Monitoring for Meaning ● Questioning ● Elements of Story ● Illustrations ● Vocabulary ● Generative Thinking ● Critique and Analyze ● Text to Text, Text to Self, Text to World Connections ● Hypothesize and Predict ● Interpret text ● Critical Literacy

Summary

By examining student talk in these three literacy events in context, students' discursive histories are unpacked. This history includes the literacy environment they inhabit, the teachers who provide experiences with literature and scaffold their explorations, and the pedagogy they encounter on a daily basis. This chapter described the context of the inquiry, the findings of data analysis, and the themes that emerged from the talk of both the students and the teachers.

This inquiry took place in Stewart Elementary school, a private school housing grades K-5 in one multiage classroom. The two novice teachers, Regina and Becky, share a similar teaching philosophy, both citing whole language and constructivism as underpinning their literacy pedagogy and curriculum. The kindergarten students in this study ranged from low to high in reading levels and oral expression abilities according to their teachers.

Talk was analyzed in three literacy events: read aloud, guided reading and literature discussion. These events were also scrutinized for the teaching protocol, the role of the teacher and student, and the characteristics of their respective talk.

Read aloud occurred daily in the multiage classroom, first thing in the morning. Texts were chosen for a variety of reasons: content areas of study, genre studies, craft lessons or even simply because a new book came in. The introduction of texts followed a typical protocol, including reading the title, naming the author and illustrator, and a brief exchange about what the book might be about. As the teacher read, she stopped occasionally to answer or pose specific questions designed to increase and check

comprehension. Though students could comment and ask questions, the teacher remained largely in control of read aloud conversation, owing in part to the fact that students had to raise their hands before speaking. Read aloud time for students, was a time to listen, enjoy, and ultimately, comprehend the text. The beginning of read aloud offered students a chance to briefly activate prior knowledge, and the conclusion included affirmation that basic comprehension was achieved. During the reading, students could ask questions, and kindergarten students most commonly commented on, or asked questions about illustrations. However, based on the established purpose of read aloud, students understood that it was not an extended reading experience; they initiated conversation less frequently.

The teachers clearly defined the purpose of guided reading to be a time of reading instruction; the focus was geared towards decoding skills and strategies. Teachers chose texts for guided reading based on the leveling system adopted by the school. The introduction of the text allowed students to decode the title and generally gave students a brief moment to activate prior knowledge. Talk occurred during guided reading every few pages.

The teachers promoted talk that dealt directly with the text. They asked closed-ended questions to address the teaching focus for that text. Their questions focused on reading skills and strategies and prompted students to think about text features, word solving strategies, and occasionally, comprehension. The format for talk established by the teachers often followed an IRE format (Mehan, 1979) with the teacher initiating talk, a student responding based on the direction of the initiation, and a subsequent evaluation. The talk in guided reading occurred between teacher and student.

Students in guided reading followed the direction established by the teacher. They rarely initiated talk, and their comments and questions were in response to the teacher. Students spoke in brief phrases and the content of their talk remained on what was happening in the text and the teaching point that the teacher suggested.

Literature discussion for kindergarten students mirrored literature discussion for older students in some respects; the distinguishing element is that the teacher read the text aloud to these students who were not yet independent readers. Literature discussion groups met two or three times a week, depending on the schedule. Texts were chosen by the teacher with an aim to challenge students' thinking and encourage them to talk. Teachers used a combination of familiar and unfamiliar texts. Talk in literature discussion was embedded in the reading, and again at the end of the book. The teacher facilitated more and directly taught less in literature discussion. She was an essential part of literature discussion, and scaffolded talk through how long she paused to encourage talk, how long she permitted student talk to go on, her skillful and strategic use of open-ended questions, and finally, how she left students' comments, questions and insights unevaluated.

Students in literature discussion had more control of the conversation. They shared the role of initiator with the teachers and they showed more evidence of questioning in this event than in any other. Students spoke in longer sentences, articulating ideas clearly. They had conversations with each other, as well as with the teacher. They often answered the questions posed by their peers. These characteristics put students in the powerful position of being knowers in this literacy event. Furthermore, the content of student talk indicated that literature discussion allows them to

explore concepts important to beginning readers. They noticed illustrations more in-depth. They made connections between the text and other texts, themselves and the world. Students interpreted, analyzed and critiqued the text. Finally, in literature discussion students had the opportunity to leave the text and embark on critical literacy and identity explorations.

Overall, the way in which the teacher defined the literacy event and the purpose for each, determined the direction of student talk. In each literacy event, students initiated talk, questioned, responded to the text and others, noticed print and meaning, and acted as knowers. However, depending on the event, these themes appeared differently.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

The following chapter offers an overview of this research including the purpose of the study, the methodological procedures taken, and a summary of the findings. I conclude this chapter by discussing the implications of these findings for classroom teachers, pre-service teachers, and future research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the nature of talk surrounding the literacy events of read aloud, guided reading and literature discussion in an early childhood program. Data were collected and analyzed to uncover the role of the teacher in these events, the characteristics of student talk, and the meanings emergent readers make in literacy as evidenced by their talk. This inquiry was guided by the following research question:

- What is the nature of kindergartener's talk in read aloud, literature discussion, and guided reading?

To fully unpack the nuances of this question, the following sub questions were also investigated: 1) How does the teacher promote and sustain talk? 2) What are the characteristics of student talk in each literacy event? 3) How do the themes of talk that emerge differ among literacy events? 4) How do the themes of talk for each event provide a window into students' thinking and meaning making?

Summary of Procedures

This study was situated within a constructivist paradigm of inquiry.

Constructivism maintains that truth and knowledge are co-created by social and individual perspectives and absolute realities are unknowable (Hatch, 2002). Naturalistic methods of data collection were employed in keeping with the constructivist paradigm, including transcripts of student talk, field notes, interviews with students and teachers, and curriculum documents.

This naturalistic inquiry drew from two qualitative traditions for its design: case study and grounded theory. The case it followed was a group of five kindergarten students for twelve weeks in three literacy activities (read aloud, guided reading, and literature discussion). This study was further guided by grounded theory. Using the coding procedures of grounded theory including open, axial, and selective coding, I intensely analyzed transcripts of student talk in these literacy events; constant comparative analysis ensured data reached saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

All data collected were transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Open coding, which records first impressions and establishes initial categories was applied immediately upon transcription. Then, once an initial set of categories was established through open coding, axial coding was applied to look for interconnections between the initial categories; selective coding fully flushed out the emerging categories. I created charts and tables throughout the data analysis process to help me visualize the range of connections among the categories. Finally, I applied several additional tools of data analysis during this inquiry. I wrote memos to record my emerging insights and to help

organize initial analysis. Peer and expert debriefings challenged me to consider the scope and depth of the findings in new ways.

Summary of Findings

The questions guiding this study prompted me to consider each literacy event—read aloud, guided reading, and literature discussion—from multiple perspectives. I analyzed each event in terms of its protocol, the role of the teacher, and the characteristics of student talk in each event. In order to summarize my findings in the clearest and most succinct manner possible, this section is organized by the guiding research questions.

How does the teacher promote and sustain talk?

Teachers had immense influence over how read aloud, guided reading, and literature discussion were executed. Teachers' beliefs about the purpose of the event determined how they carried out and structured the event. This section describes the purpose of each literacy event as determined by the teachers, and subsequently, how they promoted and sustained children's talk.

The teacher played the principal role in the read aloud procedure. Teachers determined that the main purpose of read aloud was for students to listen for enjoyment and comprehend the story. The protocol for read aloud was similar from day to day and teacher to teacher. Every day began with a whole class read aloud. The children sat on the floor in a large circle; the teacher positioned herself in a rocking chair in front of the circle. Teachers chose texts for read aloud to support content area studies, to support literary genre studies, to reflect relevant special occasions such as field trips or holidays, or simply for enjoyment.

Talk was embedded throughout the read aloud event. Teachers remained essentially in control of read aloud. Students were encouraged to raise their hands when they had comments or questions, and the teacher called on students to speak. Teachers controlled how long talk occurred by either withholding or beginning the reading. After reading a passage, the teacher acted as the main initiator of conversation, either by posing a question or offering a comment. Teachers initiated questions at the beginning of the read aloud, to briefly establish background and to encourage students to make some connections to the text. Throughout the reading, teachers occasionally questioned students, using open and closed-ended questions to spot check literal comprehension or to encourage deeper thinking. However, teachers rarely allowed discussion to ripen. If students had questions or comments, the teacher either evaluated, answered, or acknowledged the student in some manner. In this, the teacher remained the knower in the event.

In guided reading teachers read with small groups of 3-5 children, all of whom read the same text. Texts were chosen based on a leveling system; texts used in guided reading were slightly harder than the students' independent reading levels. Teachers determined that the purpose of guided reading is for the teaching and development of reading skills and strategies. Guided reading followed a similar format from day to day and teacher to teacher. In guided reading, teachers introduced the book and encouraged children to decode the title. Often, teachers asked students to make a prediction based on the title of the text or the illustration on the cover. The more emergent readers took a picture walk through the text to build background.

The teachers remained in control of the guided reading event. They asked students to read a few pages and when students finished, teachers engaged students in brief episodes of talk. During these episodes, teachers controlled the event by calling on students and by initiating conversation. They asked questions designed to focus students thinking on the session's designated teaching point. Teachers most frequently asked closed-ended questions; their talk often followed an IRE structure (Mehan, 1979). This structure indicated to students that there is a right or wrong answer. Teachers discouraged students from making comments that might lead the group away from the teaching focus. The content of teacher talk focused on reading strategies, patterns in text and features of text. When discussing reading strategies or skills, teachers asked students to be metacognitive about their reading. Because the teachers defined the content of the session, asked questions and answered any infrequently posed by students, the teacher acted as the knower.

Literature discussion followed a similar daily protocol. The teachers were important to the event because they read the text aloud to the students. Teachers determined that the purpose of literature discussion was for students to think more deeply about the text, enhancing comprehension and knowledge about texts and the world. As in other literacy events, the teacher chose the texts. Texts here were chosen with an eye towards getting students to make deeper connections. Teachers introduced the text, and posed questions to promote connections. This introduction was usually brief; teachers launched quickly into reading. In literature discussion teachers read 1-3 pages and then paused to allow for mini-discussions embedded in the text. By pausing, teachers indicated to students that talk was welcome. They shared the role of conversation initiator

with students. Teachers provided scaffolding for student talk by pausing to encourage talk, looking intently at students, nodding in encouragement, commenting and questioning. Teachers frequently commented on ideas or concepts that they wanted students to think more about, but their most common initiation was in the form of open-ended questions. After asking open ended questions, teachers allowed more time for discussion to ripen among students than in any other event. When questions were posed by students, the teacher did not immediately answer, allowing other students to answer. The teacher acted as both a member and a facilitator of discussion. Because of this, both students and teachers shared the role of the knower.

What are the characteristics of student talk in each literacy event?

Students primarily followed the teacher's lead when participating in read aloud, guided reading, and literature discussion. Because teachers' set purposes directly affected how they executed and structured the event, students reacted accordingly. This section describes the characteristics of student talk in read aloud, guided reading and literature discussion.

In read aloud students sat on the floor in front of the teacher, looked at the illustrations and listened to the teacher read. Because conversation was mainly initiated by the teacher, students assumed the role of respondents. Occasionally students initiated talk with a comment or question. When kindergarten students talked they most commonly asked about, or commented on, illustrations or unfamiliar words. Their talk was closely linked to the text. Though each read aloud varied, students intermittently made connections and predictions, usually in response to teachers' nudging. Students

followed the teacher's lead concerning when to talk, how long to talk, and what the content of the talk should be about.

In guided reading students also followed the teacher's lead. Their talk was most often in the format of response to questions posed by the teacher. The adjacency pair pattern of conversation was common here often with the teacher as the initiator, the student as the responder, and then back to the teacher again. Students rarely initiated talk in guided reading. They focused on reading strategies, patterns and features of texts, and how they knew what they did about reading according to the teacher's agenda. Students in guided reading seldom strayed from the topic determined by the teacher. Their talk in this event was characterized by short sentences and phrases, and many one word answers.

In literature discussion students played a large role in initiating conversation in the form of questions and comments. Thus students demonstrated generative thinking in this event. Students talked to each other, not just the teacher; literature discussion is also the only event where students consistently answered each other's questions. The content of student talk focused on illustrations, and text to text, text to self, and text to world connections. Talk originated from the content of the texts, but frequently took students beyond literal interpretation; that is, they left the text to participate in extended, more critical discussions. Students exhibited higher level thinking: they hypothesized, interpreted, analyzed, and critiqued the text. Their talk built on and extended meaning for other members, deepening comprehension. Students' talk often edged into critical literacy as they explored emotions and identity. Because students were able to talk to each other, disagree and agree with one another, and control the content of the conversation, students in literature discussion also acted as knowers.

How do the themes of student talk that emerged differ among literacy events?

Student talk across literacy events fell into six major themes: 1) Initiating, when students introduced a conversation thread; 2) Questioning, when students requested information about a text, concept or idea; 3) Responding, when students said something in reply to a statement or question from the teacher or another group member; 4) Noticing & Naming, when students attended to, observed or considered something originating from the text; and 5) Knowing, when students demonstrated they had knowledge and control over the literacy event. These themes emerged in all three literacy events to varying degrees.

When students initiated talk it often indicated that they had something to say about the text and often promoted generative thinking. Students had the opportunity to initiate either comments or questions in read aloud. However, teachers had determined that read aloud was for enjoyment and comprehension and this, in addition to event time constraints, allowed students only intermittent initiations. In guided reading, students rarely to never initiated comments. The set purpose for this event was that teachers guide students through a teaching point centered on reading skills and strategies, thus they pushed that agenda to the exclusion of allowing student initiations. When students did initiate in guided reading, teachers quickly halted the thread. In literature discussion students initiated far more frequently. After the teacher finished a 2-3 page reading she paused. This lull gave students the time they needed to initiate conversation; these conversations were allowed to continue until they were saturated.

Questioning demonstrated that students were actively engaged in the text. In order to have a question, students had to be monitoring for meaning well enough to note

that they wanted or needed additional information. In read aloud, students questioned intermittently. Students usually entered into read aloud conversation through questions about the illustrations or unfamiliar words. In guided reading, students rarely questioned. If they did ask a question, the question usually always concerned an unfamiliar word. Students asked more questions in literature discussion than in any other event. Students questioned for clarification, to extend meaning, and to pose hypothetical wonderings.

Response was consistent throughout the three events. Examining student response in read aloud, guided reading, and literature discussion highlights how important the teacher is in scaffolding the event. In read aloud, most student talk is in response to a teacher initiation (however, responses occur in regards to other students as well). Conversation threads are brief and concise, not usually lasting more than three turns with the teacher as a major player. Students are focused on responding to the teacher, not necessarily to each other, though that can happen. In guided reading, students respond almost entirely to teacher initiations. Responses fall into a teacher-student adjacency pair structure which puts the teacher in control. In literature discussion, students respond to both teachers and peers in the form of questions and comments.

Students notice and name features and patterns of text, elements of story, illustrations, connections, and extended meanings. In read aloud, students' notice and name illustration features, characters and plot lines. They occasionally make connections and extend meaning beyond the text, though this can be infrequent. In guided reading, students notice and name reading strategies and features and patterns of text. Because of the teacher's prompting, students in guided reading are more likely to notice and name

how they know what they know about decoding text. In literature discussion, students notice and name elements of story, including characters, setting and plot, illustrations; intertextual connections between the text and other areas of study; connections to self, other texts and the world around them; and meanings beyond the text, including emotions and critical stances.

The teacher acts as the knower in both read aloud and guided reading. In literature discussion, the students and the teacher share the role of the knower. This happens because the teacher shares control of the conversation with students in both content and structure. The teacher still retains a position of a knower because she is controlling the oral reading, and because she asks occasional questions designed to nudge students into deeper thinking and conversation.

How do the themes of each event provide a window into students' thinking and meaning making?

In each literacy event, students initiated talk, questioned, responded to the text and others, noticed print and meaning, and acted as knowers. The literacy event determined the extent to which students engaged in these themes. The themes of talk that emerged from students offer evidence of the reading strategies and behaviors that students strengthened.

In read aloud students made text to text connections, they explored elements of story, discussed illustrations to create and extend meaning, expanded and noticed vocabulary, monitored for comprehension. Less frequent, but still evident, were students' predictions, interpretations and personal connections.

In guided reading students mostly talked about patterns and features of text. The attempted decoding strategies and then spoke metacognitively about those strategies. Students talked briefly about their predictions based on text titles and illustrations.

In literature discussion, students demonstrated that they monitored for meaning through their questions and responses. Furthermore, students discussed elements of story, illustrations, and puzzling vocabulary. Students' talk demonstrated generative and critical thinking; students connected the text to other texts, their own personal experiences, and the world around them. They interpreted, critiqued and analyzed the text. Finally, students talk edged into critical literacy as they left the text to discuss issues of identity and society.

Discussion

First, it is important to note that the teachers who participated in this research, Regina and Becky, are novice teachers. Having recently graduated, Regina and Becky are still apprentices in pedagogy, learning as they go. Other teachers with more experience or who have different backgrounds might implement the literacy events of read aloud, guided reading, and literature discussion differently. For example, many teachers commonly use read aloud to focus students' attention on writers' craft. Or another teacher might use guided reading to focus on retell and comprehension. Other teachers might not even implement literature discussion with students this young, but would instead use read aloud to elicit deeper thinking and response from students. What is significant is that teachers approach literacy events differently, based on their intended outcome. Regina and Becky determined a purpose for read aloud (enjoyment and comprehension), guided reading (reading skills and strategies) and literature discussion

(deep thinking and meaning-making). In order to realize the particular literacy event's purpose, teachers' talk changed accordingly.

Barnes (1975/1992) explored the notion that as communication changes, learning changes. This research illustrates how the task determines the talk. That is, the teacher's agenda and positioning directly impacts the structure and content of her language. Given the task, the teachers talk changes—as teachers moved from event to event their talk altered. In turn, the language of the teacher evokes a certain kind of response and conversation from students. If we examine the purpose of the literacy event set by the teachers, we see how it directly impacted how long they let students talk, the content of talk deemed appropriate and the structure of who is allowed to talk. For example, in guided reading, teachers have established that the focus should be on reading skills and strategies. Because of this focus, the teacher dominates the talk to promote her teaching agenda and students respond to her prompts in short sentences, phrases, and one word answers. On the other hand, in literature discussion, the purpose is for students to talk to deepen thinking and comprehension. Therefore, the teacher asked open ended questions designed to nudge students' thinking and then allowed students' conversation to ripen. The goal and aim of each literacy event is different, thus teachers use different language with children. Children's response and language is, in turn, affected.

Another critical discussion point is that it is necessary to look at each of these three literacy events as just one part of a literacy program. Read aloud, guided reading, and literature discussion all contribute to the reading development of young students. In read aloud, students are engaging their reading affect, enjoying the reading experience and comprehending literature that is too complex for them to handle independently. In

guided reading, students are focusing on how they know what they know about reading, and they are learning specific reading skills and strategies for decoding text. This helps them become more efficient and effective readers. In literature discussion students are extending meaning beyond the text, making connections, and engaging in higher level thinking. They are speaking in longer sentences, demonstrating more developed thinking. Through literature, students are exploring the world around them. If any one of these events is missing, students potentially lose opportunities to develop reading skills and understandings essential for emergent readers. If guided reading is the only component of a literacy program, then students will miss out on engaging the affective domain of literacy; they can miss out on crucial opportunities for deepening language development and meaning making.

This research reveals the power of literature discussion. Most early childhood programs do not include a literature discussion component because most young students are not yet independent readers. Though many teachers use read aloud to promote talk about texts, it is rarely as in depth as the literature discussion observed in this research. The students in this study were kindergarteners and they engaged in highly sophisticated conversations about texts. They demonstrated higher order thinking and they took on mature literacy discussant roles. It is important to note that students wove in and out of this sophisticated conversation. Sometimes they were silly and sometimes they simply did not have a lot to say about the book. However, the potential for this deep talk was always there; by providing the space for open talk about texts, teachers provided students with potential space for themes to emerge. Eleanor Duckworth (1974) wrote that “the having of wonderful ideas” is the essence of intellectual development; she believed that

in order for students to have wonderful ideas, they must have something worthwhile to think about. Literature discussion provided students with the space to have wonderful ideas.

Wilson (2004) explored the notion of “educationally privileged” students engaging in literature study. This term does not necessarily refer to economic status, but rather addresses children who live in homes with parents or guardians who highly value education. The students who participated in this study were educationally privileged. They understood the rules (unspoken and spoken) of these literacy events. Teachers occasionally redirected students and reminded them of their expectations; however, students were rarely off-task and there were very few management issues. There were never any instances of blatant rule breaking.

The educationally privileged students in this study used more complex speech patterns. Basil Bernstein (1962) examined how language is used to establish social position. He explored patterns of speech in the "restricted code" of lower-class speakers and the "elaborated code" of middle-class speakers. The middle class "elaborated" linguistic code is a more formal and verbally flexible use of language, allowing speakers to clearly distinguish one idea from another. Bernstein's classic example of this is the common prefix “I think” used by speakers. Bernstein also explored the “restricted code” of working class people, which he characterized as limited in specificity and explanation. In examining the talk of the students in this inquiry, it is clear students' speech patterns are more elaborated in nature. Students who come from different backgrounds may have exhibited different patterns of speech under Bernstein's classification.

Implications

These findings offer important implications for the role of talk about text in emergent literacy programs. In our current climate of school testing, many teachers have turned to more teacher directed reading instruction. This research highlights the importance of allowing students time to discuss and explore literature to deepen their thinking about the text and the world around them. The meanings and understandings about literature that students realized in each literacy event were unique. Therefore, the absence of one or more literacy component, or the overemphasis of one event may detract from students maximizing their full potential in reading and thinking.

Implications for the Classroom

This research has highlighted the fundamental role that teachers play in structuring literacy experiences for young children. Johnston (2004) said:

Teachers play a critical role in arranging the discursive histories from which these children speak. Talk is the central tool of their trade. With it they mediate children's activity and experience and help them make sense of learning, literacy, life and themselves. (p. 3)

The teacher is instrumental in setting the tone, length, depth and breadth of students' conversations by virtue of the texts she chooses, her own language, and how she structures literacy experiences. This research demonstrated how vital teachers are to the understandings students created about literacy. Thus, there are important classroom implications to consider.

Teachers often feel restricted by time. There is frequently too little time to fit in all the literacy experiences that teachers want. The teachers in this research had a 90 minute literacy block to implement these events. However, when time is an issue, teachers might rotate days in which the events occurred or combine events. The most

obvious combination is that of read aloud and literature discussion. Many teachers do not define read aloud as narrowly as these teachers did. It is quite common for teachers to use whole group read aloud to encourage student talk and deeper thinking. Teachers simply have to set the purpose. This purpose will determine how the event is structured and the language that is used by all participants. However, it is important to bear in mind that research has established that when students participate in small group experiences, they talk more openly and with greater frequency; small group instruction has been linked to more effective schools (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, and Walpole, 1999). No matter how teachers define literacy events, it is crucial that young children have opportunities to participate in small group experiences that provide increased opportunities for in-depth talk engagements.

Teachers have to consider how texts' evoke a certain response. The texts chosen for engaging students in this inquiry were fundamental to the overall experience. Texts introduced students to ideas and concepts familiar and unfamiliar. Many of the texts chosen by the teachers in this study presented students with mature issues such as death, natural disaster, culture, and racism. Because the texts invited it, students frequently engaged in discussions of morality. Lawrence Kohlberg (1969) suggests that children developed ways of thinking through their experiences which include understandings of moral concepts such as justice, rights, and equality. Kohlberg identifies levels of moral development that range from moral judgments that are highly concrete and focus on certain rules, to elements of morality that transcend the laws of cultures and societies. The students involved in this inquiry engaged in debates about morality in literature discussions that spanned the levels outlined by Kohlberg. Students debated what is fair

or right on an individual level and advanced to moral discussions of what is fair, or sometimes acceptable, in regards to stealing in *The Red Balloon*. Teachers have to understand the powerful role that literature plays in advancing the moral development of young learners.

Another vital implication is that just as texts evoke a certain response, so does the language of the teachers. Teachers need to be aware that the purpose they set for each literacy event, and the techniques and strategies they use, can constrain the kind of talk they use. This, in turn, will constrain student talk. Talk is a powerful tool for the promotion of thinking and understanding, and when students are verbally constrained, meaning making is potentially inhibited. Teachers must be very clear about their intentions as they structure literacy events and the purposes they set for each. Students are highly sensitive to teachers' purposes; they quickly pick up on the rules of the literacy events set by teachers. Therefore teachers have to know *why* they implement particular pedagogical strategies. They have to reexamine their beliefs about the purpose for the events they incorporate into their literacy programs to make sure they meet the literacy needs of the students they teach.

Teachers in early childhood programs have to look towards students' language development as an inherent part of literacy acquisition. Verbal expression and fluency can be found on grade cards across the nation. It is imperative for teachers to remember that in order for children to have strong language development and expression, they have to engage in activities that give students opportunities to explore language. Halliday (1980) posits that there are three aspects of language development: learning language, learning through language and learning about language. The literacy events included in

any literacy program have to afford students experiences with generating and organizing language for communication; the events have to allow students to share and create meaning in social learning experiences. To do this, teachers have to look at how their own discourse either encourages or inhibits student talk.

Currently, teachers everywhere feel constraints on curriculum brought on by national high stakes testing. In an effort to meet new demands, teachers often turn towards a more teacher directed, skill focused literacy curriculum. This research suggests that curriculum constraints that produce more skills oriented curriculum narrow students' language and reading knowledge. When students are placed in passive roles as learners, they miss out on essential opportunities for language and higher order thinking development. These things are fundamental to students' basic literacy knowledge.

Based on the implications of these findings, I urge teachers to fight for what they know is important to early childhood literacy development. When teachers feel pressured to remove events such as read aloud and literature discussion from their literacy programs in order to teach "skills" they miss out on important opportunities to do just that. That is, when students think deeply and engage in critical discussion about texts, they make important discoveries about texts essential for reading understanding and development. Teachers need to view literacy as greater than decoding words and implement what research has shown to be effective for reading growth.

Implications for Teacher Education

This research offers important implications for teacher education. Professors in teacher development programs who work with pre-service teachers should consider reexamining what they teach future teachers about designing literacy programs. These

implications can be generalized to all areas of educating the young child; however, I will focus my discussion on literacy development.

First, this research offers a new perspective on defining what balanced means for reading education. Recently literacy education has focused on establishing balanced literacy programs. Typically, a balanced literacy program promotes reading and writing experiences that range from modeled to guided to independent experiences. Balanced literacy includes approaches to reading that emphasize the strategies students need to become fluent readers. The philosophy behind a balanced literacy program is that students need both contextual and isolated literacy practice. Balanced literacy encourages experiences that value both decoding and comprehension in reading. Yet the way that balanced literacy is implemented is often too narrow. A truly balanced literacy program would incorporate a language component that permits students to engage in literacy events that nudge them into generative language engagements. Literacy events that encourage student talk should be weighed in any measure of balanced literacy in early childhood.

Another consideration for teacher educators is how to address developmental stages or prescribed phases of growth. Though it is important to consider developmentally appropriate practice, curriculum often limits young children; pre-service teachers may easily underestimate what young children can do. If we evaluate students' literacy response only in terms of text to self, text to text or text to world connections we ignore untold opportunities to foster students' understandings about reading. Again, if we narrow our expectations, we miss out on layers of untapped meaning making and comprehension. We have to avoid setting ceilings on children. This research has shown

that when provided the space to think deeply and respond meaningfully to texts, young children can surpass expectations. Sue Bredekamp (1997) notes that developmentally appropriate curriculum is meaningful and respects the academic integrity of early learners. She cautions teachers against focusing on what is “cute” in early childhood education and urges them to help students to reach their full potential through curriculum based on academic integrity. It is important that pre-service teachers have appropriately high expectations of what our earliest learners can do in terms of literacy and language development.

Finally, I believe it is time to emphasize the importance of talk in the classroom with future teachers. Pre-service teacher education often neglects an in-depth examination of the importance of student talk, the window it provides into their meaning making, and how it is a tool for extending thinking. Teacher education often advocates for social interaction but neglects to dig into the theory of *why* and *how* that interaction is so crucial. Likewise, it is imperative that teachers revisit how their own language impacts their students. Again, I call for a more intense analysis of this in pre-service studies. Though it is possible that teachers will not truly grasp how important language is until they are in the classroom, the seeds have to be planted before they enter the field. Neil Mercer (2000) states, “The creation of human knowledge is not simply the accumulation of facts, skills, and ways of making sense of experience. It is also a process of evolution in which alternative explanations, proposals and solutions compete for survival” (p. 73). If we can help future teachers understand that learning is more than fact recalling—that learning is the process that gets students there—then talk will be a highly valued classroom tool.

Implications for Further Research

This study took place in a multiage classroom in a Midwestern private school. The context is rather narrow. Other studies similar to this one need to be conducted with different populations of children, and with children of different age and socioeconomic groups. This is important for understanding the findings of this research in a more global context.

As I analyzed and interpreted my findings, I was repeatedly struck by the sense that there were intertextual ties among the literacy events and between the events and other content areas of study. Children were cycling back and forth and using what they had learned in one event to deepen the experience of another. However, I did not have concrete data to support my impressions. Research intended to specifically examine the intertextuality between literacy events and between literacy and content area need to be done to understand the multifaceted nature of literacy development.

My final recommendation for future research falls in line with the suggestions of Debbie Rowe (2005) in that I think early childhood literacy research needs to look more towards social practice perspectives. This shift in focus calls researchers to examine students' *participation* in literacy events. I believe that the students involved in this research borrowed identities as certain types of readers as they went from event to event; they had to understand the social rules and procedures that structured their participation in the events. This speaks to the importance of allowing students opportunities to approximate literacy experiences beyond what is typically expected of emerging learners. More research that explores the hypotheses students have about literacy, the literacy positions and identities that are open to children, and the power structures that impact

students' literacy constructions should be carried out. Studies that examine these social practice components will shed light on how literacy is affected by social interaction and discourse.

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Appendix A
Letter of Approval from Stewart Elementary

January 02, 2005

To: University of Missouri Internal Review Board

From: Leslie Willey
Education Department-Director

RE: Martille Eaton proposal

I have agreed to be the Education Department liaison in the supervision of Martille Eaton's proposed research project, "The Nature of Talk during Literacy". I have read Martille's proposal and met with her to discuss the research methods she will employ. I enthusiastically support this research project and believe Martille will conduct her study with integrity. I also believe the Stewart Elementary School parents will support this research project. All of the parents in this particular classroom have signed a "blanket" consent form for research projects which are on file in the Education Department Office. Additional permission will be sought for this research project.

If you have any questions or require further information, please feel free to contact me.

Leslie Willey

Appendix B
Stewart General Consent Letter

GENERAL RESEARCH PERMISSION

We are aware that Stewart Elementary is a laboratory school and Stewart College students will interact with the children as a part of their required course work or research project.

We give our permission for _____ to participate in such interactions.

Parent/Guardian

Date

We give permission for _____ to be videotaped, audiotaped, and/or photographed.

Parent/Guardian

Date

We give our permission for _____ to participate in field trips as part of the laboratory program.

Parent/Guardian

Date

We give our permission to the staff of Stephens College Children's School to obtain emergency medical treatment if we cannot be reached.

Physician's Name _____

Address _____

Phone # _____

Parent/Guardian

Date

Appendix C
Parent Informed Consent Letter

This consent form is to grant permission for your child _____ to participate in a research project. I will be looking at the kinds of things students discuss when they meet in small group during literacy. To do this, I will observe during the literacy events: read aloud, guided reading and literature discussion. I will talk to the classroom teachers regularly to get their insights into the students' work. The project is sponsored by the University of Missouri-Columbia under the supervision of Carol Gilles, Ph.D. The University of Missouri Institutional Review Board has approved the project.

I understand the following:

- My child's part in the research is to participate in regular literature events already occurring in literacy. My child's conversations will be tape recorded and transcribed in order to learn more about talk that occurs in these situations.
- My child may also be interviewed. This interview will be a part of the class and will occur in a group setting. My child may be asked to elaborate on an idea or discuss my thoughts about a particular comment made.
- Children will participate during the normal literacy time so that school will not be interrupted. There are no risks or discomforts to my child outside of normal school literacy structures.
- All students' anonymity will be maintained. In any publication of results, false names will be used.
- Participation is voluntary. Choosing to participate or not participate will in no way affect my child academically. No opportunities will be opened or closed based on my child's participation. If there are any questions regarding human subject research feel free to contact the Institutional Review Board at the University of MO-Columbia (573-882-9585). With questions regarding this particular study, please contact Martille Elias (573) 808-2901.

I hereby give my permission to take part in the classroom-based research conducted by Martille Elias from the University of Missouri outlined above.

Please return the signed portion to Martille Elias

I hereby give my permission for my son/daughter _____ to take part in the classroom-based research conducted by Martille Elias from the University of Missouri outlined above.

Signed _____

Date _____

Appendix D
Teacher Informed Consent Form

This letter is to inform you about my intended research project. Please read it over carefully before deciding if you will consent. I will be looking at the kinds of things students discuss when they meet in small group during literacy. To do this, I will observe during the literacy events: read aloud, guided reading and literature discussion. I will talk to you regularly to get your insights into the students' work. The project is sponsored by the University of Missouri-Columbia under the supervision of Carol Gilles, Ph.D. The University of Missouri Institutional Review Board has approved the project.

I understand the following:

- My part in the research is to continue teaching regular literacy events already occurring in literacy. Students' conversations will be tape recorded and transcribed in order to learn more about talk that occurs in these situations. I understand that I will be recorded and transcribed as well.
- I will be interviewed about my teaching practices and my insights about daily occurrences.
- School will not be interrupted. There are no risks or discomforts to me or my students outside of normal school literacy structures.
- My anonymity will be maintained. In any publication of results, false names will be used.
- My participation is voluntary. Choosing to participate or not participate will in no way affect my standing in the school. No opportunities will be opened or closed based on my participation. If there are any questions regarding human subject research feel free to contact the Institutional Review Board at the University of MO-Columbia (573-882-9585). With questions regarding this particular study, please contact Martille Elias (573) 808-2901.

I hereby agree to take part in the classroom-based research conducted by Martille Elias from the University of Missouri outlined above.

Please return the signed portion to Martille Elias

I, _____ hereby agree to take part in the classroom-based research conducted by Martille Elias from the University of Missouri outlined above.

Signed _____

Date _____

Appendix E
Teacher Interview Protocols

Background (Phase I)

Tell me about yourself...

What is your normal literacy routine?

Describe your literacy program?

--read aloud (what happens here?)

--guided reading (what happens here?)

--literature discussion (what happens here?)

What is your purpose for conducting read aloud?

--guided reading?

--literature discussion?

How do you choose books?

What do you believe about the role of talk in the classroom?

What differences do you see in the literacy attitudes and abilities in the various ages in this classroom?

What are your expectations for my study?

Conferring (Ongoing)

Tell me about today? What did you see happening?

What do you think the main focus of today's discussion was?

Were there any adjustments you had to make?

Can you tell me more about...(insert a particular student or occurrence)?

What do you plan to do next?

End of Year (Phase III)

Describe your literacy program?

--read aloud (what happens here?)

--guided reading (what happens here?)

--literature discussion (what happens here?)

How often do you meet?

Before I got here?

What is your purpose for conducting read aloud?

--guided reading?

--literature discussion?

How do you choose books?

What intuitively do you think I will find when I analyze the data?

How have the kids grown?

In retrospect would you do anything different in literacy for next year?

Appendix F
Sample of Coded Field Notes

Date	Literacy Event	Note	Analysis
2/10	Read Aloud	Kids raise their hands because of the whole group format. Teacher pauses slightly when it is appropriate to talk.	-Methodological Note
2/10	Read Aloud	Kindergarten children talk a lot in RA. They are more likely to discuss illustrations. This is what they know the best, it gives them access to the conversation.	-Observational Note -Theoretical Note
2/10	Guided	Teacher uses guided reading to check for comprehension and word decoding. Most of their word attack is focused on phonetic decoding.	-Observational Note
2/10	Lit. Disc.	Even though conversation happens throughout literature discussion, when the book is finished students dig in deep. Here they are more likely to leave the text.	-Observational Note -Theoretical Note

Appendix G
List of Texts

Texts, Titles, and Authors

Read Aloud

RA Transcript 1: *Remember: The Journey to School Integration*, Toni Morrison

RA Transcript 2: *Flossie the Fox*, Patricia McKissack

RA Transcript 3: *Paper Boy*, Dave Pilkey

RA Transcript 4: *Barefoot: The Underground Railroad*, Pamela Duncan Edwards

RA Transcript 5: *The Wise Woman and her Secret*, Eve Merriam

RA Transcript 6: *The Day of Ahmed's Secret*, Florence Parry Heide

Guided Reading

GR Transcript 1: *The Biggest Cake in the World*, Elizabeth Spur

GR Transcript 2: *Log Hotel*, Anne Schreiber

GR Transcript 3: *Trolley Ride*, Anne Bryant

GR Transcript 4: *Zoo Looking*, Mem Fox

GR Transcript 5: *Smile*, Jane Buxton

GR Transcript 6: *Rumble in the Jungle*, Giles Andreae

Literature Discussion

LD Transcript 1: *A Chair for my Mother*, Vera Williams

LD Transcript 2: *The Wall*, Eve Bunting

LD Transcript 3: *The Red Balloon*, Albert Lamorisse

LD Transcript 4: *Meet Danitra Brown*, Nikki Grimes

LD Transcript 5: *White Wash*, Ntozake Shange

LD Transcript 6: *Ghost Wings*, Barbara Joose

VITA

Martille R. Elias grew up in Grants Pass, Oregon where she completed elementary and secondary education. She received her B.S in Elementary Education from Stephens College in 1998, her M.Ed. in Reading Education from the University of Missouri-Columbia, in 2002, and her Ph.D. in Literacy from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2006. Martille has taught kindergarten through fifth grade in both self-contained and multiage classrooms. She has worked as an independent consultant in reading and writing for several school districts in Missouri and her work as a consultant also took her to Monteverde, Costa Rica for research and teacher development. Martille has taught extensively as an adjunct professor for the University of Missouri-Columbia and Stephens College and has had multiple engagements in research as a Graduate Research Assistant to Dr. Carol Gilles at the University of Missouri-Columbia. Martille is married to Richard M. Elias and has recently accepted a position as Assistant Professor of Literacy at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.