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WRITING IN A CROWDED PLACE: PEERS COLLABORATING IN A THIRD GRADE WRITER'S WORKSHOP

By

Archer Johnston Israel

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGE, READING AND CULTURE

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

1999
As members of the Final Examination Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Archer Israel entitled "Writing in a Crowded Place: Peer Collaboration in Writer's Workshop" and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copy of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

Dissertation Director Luis Moll
STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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SIGNED: Archibald Dorael
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I came to the University of Arizona in search of great teachers, and I was not disappointed. I have learned so much from the professors I have been fortunate to work with. Dr. Carol Evans, I thank you for your friendship and support when I was struggling to understand what I conceivably might have to add to the enormous body of work in literacy research. You were my first mentor, and like one’s first true love, I will never forget you. Dr. Dana Fox, I thank you for being my safe haven, for helping me re-vision my writing until I found my own voice, for helping me cross that bridge from writing to display, to writing to discover. Thank you for your own process as a reflective practitioner, on which I have modeled my own process. Dra. Arminda Fuentevilla, I thank you for sharing your tremendous passion and energy with me, for getting me started and seeing me through my preliminary examinations. Dr. Luis Moll, I thank you for your mentoring, but mostly I thank you for your own scholarship, for making accessible the works of Vygotsky and opening up for me a world of thought and research in sociocultural theory in education. Dr. Richard Ruiz, I thank you for helping me understand the politics of bilingual education, and the complex issues of race, language and ontological status that frame minority children.

If I have learned anything through this study, it has been truly to understand the collaborative nature of print. The words that appear in the final draft of this manuscript only came to know as I shared my thoughts, drafts and intentions for this dissertation with others. My dissertation has been a collaborative effort from beginning to end, and what a community it has taken to raise this child! The community of people I have been lucky to know has included many of my fellow students at the University of Arizona. So many of you inspired me when I didn’t know what I wanted to say, or how to say it. Sheila Randolph Bacon, who kept me laughing, Steven Bialostok, who read so conscientiously, Josefina Castillo, who took me out to lunch the day I had decided to quit, Jeanne Favela, who tracked down that last elusive citation, and Christine Ward and Darin Payne, who helped me understand so much about voice, and whose faces are always in the audience I write for.

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Ruth Kartchner, mi hermana del alma who has been there with me shoulder to shoulder through thick and thin, and whose friendship enriches me daily.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my students, to ‘Rico’, ‘Tenaya’, and ‘Marco’ who taught me so much about being a member of a caring, learning community. I rest my hopes for them and their possible lives on the notion of the indefatigability of critical consciousness.

I dedicate this also to my family, my own caring community which I so often take for granted, on which I so rely, and which is unspeakably precious to me. Without you, Harold, Aurora, Caleb, and Bana, there would be no story to tell.
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents three case studies of collaborative interaction in a third-grade dual-language classroom during writing instruction over the course of a school year. The study addresses the notion of developing student voice, and how instruction can be seated so that students' narratives will assume central stage in the classroom, creating the opportunity for dialog between students' texts and the texts of the school. This study is situated between a progressive perspective that emphasizes growth through self reflection, organically driven texts, and above all individual meaning, and a post-progressive perspective that challenges educators to provide explicit instruction in the privileged discourses of the dominant ideology. A significant feature of the study is the evolution of the Writing Workshop into a Writer's Workshop, as the focus of activity became the students and their intentions for their texts. The Writer's Workshop was characterized by active and varied peer collaborations as students interacted in a community of writers. The study describes the varied expressions of critical literacy as the case study children interacted with peers to create texts that were shared daily. Critical literacy is defined as the ability to use print as a tool for developing critical consciousness. This was demonstrated in the increasingly sophisticated intentions students established for their texts, as they wrote to shock, entertain, influence and reflect. The study underscores the damage to children whose language and literacy development is assessed to be deficient, particularly in the case of bilingual or bidialectic children, and how remedial instruction disrupts not only the child's own incremental progress, but their membership in a supportive learning community.
PROLOGUE

As much as anything else, this document chronicles my journey thus far as a teacher, particularly of writing, of minority language and culture children. It has been a long trip, and I have been forced to examine every ‘truth I held to be self-evident’ along the way. I submit this long prologue because I believe it is important, although perhaps risky, to share why I care so passionately about the students I have been fortunate to know, to reveal the other voices and many faces beneath the surface of this paper. I am not engaged in an academic exercise, but rather, in a passionate search for the REAL.

As a child of divorced and remarried parents, I struggled to find my place at home. My stepfather engaged me in an all out war for my mother’s loyalties, and he won. In loss, I defined myself by defiance. Although my parents certainly did not fit the expected profiles for neglectful or abusive parents, I did indeed grow up needy. One memory stands out in my mind as the beacon that lit up for me possibilities outside my own experience. I spent eight weeks at camp during the summer of my eighth year, the year my mother remarried. Week after week children came and children left, reunited with their families after a brief interlude, yet I stayed on and on and on. Then one day my friend Alexandra invited me to join her and her family for a day at the beach. And all day long her father carried me around, never put me down, never held me “wrong,” my heart beating with anxiety and fear. He carried me out into the ocean and showed me how to roll my head and breathe in time with the waves, showed me how to protect my pale skin with Sea and Ski. Never once did Alex react with jealousy or ownership. This family seemed to operate on the notion of abundance: the notion of an “increasing sum” human
economy of caring.

I never forgot that experience, nor the central importance of having been shown, even just once, the miraculous possibilities for a model of living outside my own existence. Consciousness of the life-changing impact of that day has driven my interactions with my students all my life. Mr. I don’t remember -your-name, thank you. I carry your legacy with me.

As a member of the dominant socioeconomic group, my emancipation is a credit to the notion of meritocracy. I worked hard; I was lucky to grasp the outstretched hands that helped me find my way. But meritocracy is indeed a false notion; over the years, equally Herculean efforts by my students of color have not led them to self-actualization. My deepest commitment to my students rises from my own intimate knowledge of what it felt like to me to live fettered and afraid, tempered by the knowledge that the road to their transformation is far steeper. May mine be one of many hearts to guide them. May they keep their eyes on the prize.
Autobiographical Background

I am a white woman of mixed European heritage; my mother's mother came from Belfast, Ireland in early 1900's. She might even have seen my father's mother at Ellis Island when she arrived at about the same time from Odessa, Ukraine.

I come from a family of writers; that is, people who value and enjoy print. Our family correspondence, though spotty, is characterized by humor and a sense of domination over the medium of print. Haphazard typographical errors become a springboard for puns and messages within the message. Our shared oral language history, full of the serendipitous influences of Samuel Beckett and Monty Python, provide us with a common backdrop of verbal gymnastics that sneak into our letters and e-mail.

My development as a teacher, in particular, as a teacher of writing, has been a long evolution. For many years I have worked with minority language/culture students in a broad variety of contexts. As a sixteen-year-old in the early seventies I was recruited by a local vocational program to work as an ESL tutor. Newburg, New York, was suddenly home to scores of Honduran refugees, all needing survival English. It is an interesting concept, survival English. Perhaps my students found the label less insulting than I do now. After years of living in mortal danger, guarantees of survival may have appeared magnanimous indeed. Later, as a college undergraduate, I tutored a new wave of refugees from Vietnam. Still later I worked as a teacher and program coordinator providing language services to yet another group of refugees, this time from Cambodia. My Khmer students never got away from me. Over the years, I taught them in a K-3 multilevel, got them again in Middle School, tutored them in Junior High, and spent the
morning with them in our ESL classes at the High School. We wrote daily in a Writing Workshop, had sheltered English study groups for content area subjects, shared our curriculum in cross-cultural communication with the students in the alternative education class, and made food and entertainment for festivals commemorating the Cambodian New Year to which we invited the school community. I believed in the value of what I was doing, and I did indeed help facilitate the development of my students’ ability to navigate in English through school. I was sure, and assured them, that the route to equal access lay in their becoming linguistically and culturally fluent. The year the high school boys turned sixteen was the year I realized the lie I had inadvertently told them all those years. As they went out into the larger community to look for after-school jobs, they were turned away, over and over again, while their white classmates were offered employment at the grocery stores, donut shops, and the local gas station. We sat, in the tiny windowless room we called our study, silenced. We would never be the same.

Refugee Education

Asian in a white man's world...

In this land of white anonymity, condemned to wear your inner secrets on your face. Never to hedge your true identity, nor play out fantasies of other selves. For in the mirror of this world a brown skinned face and almond eyes Reflect a limited horizon.

Cultural hierarchy, (much denied) mosaic crushed to dust. Against the backdrop of your white-skinned peers, You are disempowered.

Awareness of this weakened state hits hard at age sixteen. Slaughter in the killing fields had been a quicker death than starving in the land of plenty. The body dies more willingly than the soul.
I would no longer be able to participate in the process of mystification that attempted to obscure the automatic social privilege accorded me because of the color of my skin, and the language I speak, privilege that had securely insulated me from the realities of structural inequality that shaped my students' lives. My eyes were now forced open to the real attitudes of the school community toward my students. Physiognomically marked and an ethnic group of color, they were easily identified as the other and targeted as suspect. When magnets were missing from a sewing class, no matter that some three hundred additional students had access to that room, my students were implicated. It quickly appeared there was no limit to the possible unsubstantiated misbehaviors attributed to my students: drug selling, gang involvement, and a predisposition to violence. In strictest confidence I was warned that the new assistant principal had been overheard muttering, 'Cambodians, I wish I had an Uzi'.

I left them, Yorth, Navy, Map, Chamroeun, Tol, Houth, Heap, Pheap, Naren, Rasmey, Toeurm, Phoeun, Sophin, Soeut, Soreasey, Sorassa, Virak... I left my beloved students behind to pursue a graduate degree in literacy and culture studies, wanting both to increase my own knowledge, and to find the means to share what I knew with my teaching colleagues. The first year of studies found me in graduate classes that were frequently convened with undergraduates. In a class investigating the concept of educating for cultural pluralism I experienced another critical incident. The class began to delve into issues of the power differential of privileged and non-privileged groups, the politics of language distribution, and I was often in discussion with younger minority language/culture students who were coming to conscious awareness for the first time with
the enormity of their marginalization and victimization by a political and social system that inherently values and privileges one group, White, over all other groups. As I observed their rage and grief, I suddenly realized the tremendous degree to which I have been advantaged. I had to relearn myself in terms of a person of privilege, very much to the disadvantage of the minority language and culture people with whom I had worked extensively, and had come to admire greatly. This was later defined for me, through readings in critical pedagogy, in Marxist terms (Gadotti 1996).

This left me, as a member of the dominating group, in an estranged position. Was it possible for me, a member of the culture of power, to participate in minority education? For, no matter how much self-pride I tried to foster in my students, no matter how intensively I integrated their languages, literatures, ways of seeing, purposes for knowing into our classroom, the very fact of my white face as the teacher in the classroom illustrated and created the structural inequality that controls who they might be.

William Pinar (1989 p.175) suggests the need for a

psychoanalytically informed interdisciplinary study and re-experience of the past so that white guilt can be claimed and perhaps forgiven, so that (people of color) can rediscover, to an extent that perhaps they have not yet, their strengths, courage, and competence.

This is key, I believe, to the possibility of a place for me as a member of a multiethnic learning community.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In the following chapter I address the rationale for this study, identify the elements of the theoretical framework supporting the research, and introduce the notions of voice, discourse, race and power that are problematized throughout the study. I present my own intentions for the research, and influences on this study from my previous case study research. I then define critical literacy and critical consciousness as key concepts guiding this research, and situate myself as the researcher, addressing the problems inherent in my role as teacher-researcher. Finally, I provide a brief overview of the remaining chapters of the study.

Rationale For the Study

Freire: Dialog is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it... Knowing is a social event, with nevertheless an individual dialog.

Shor: What the teacher knows, the teacher then relearns through studying with students.
(Freire & Shor, 1987 p. 98-101)

Intentions of the Research Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of various forms of peer collaboration on the development of literacy manifested by students while writing during Writer's Workshop. The theoretical framework for this study is founded upon Vygotsky's (1978) concepts of the zone of proximal development, and the foundational concept of socially mediated cognition as they have been extended to include the notion of expert peer by such researchers as Daiute and Dalton, (1993). I draw as well as Dyson's research (1989, 1993a 1993b, 1994, 1995) that illuminates the notion that children create text
worlds through social interaction, and social worlds through interaction with text, and other studies addressing sociocultural aspects of classrooms (Edelsky, 1986; Newkirk, 1992; Peterson, 1992; Bean, 1997; Schultz, 1997). I also investigate the notion of voice and discourse (Gee, 1994, 1996; Ruiz, 1997) as they affect student choice in Writer's Workshop and their options in the school environment. These are considered in light of the development of critical literacy and the concept of critical consciousness, which are both further discussed in a following section of Chapter One entitled, 'Developing Critical Literacy'. A tangential but significant topic also arose from my concerns as a White teacher of children of color, and the viability and appropriateness of my participation in the education of race minority children (Giroux, 1992, 1997a, 1997b; Harris, 1994; Shannon, 1994; Hooks, 1995).

Context of the Research Study

Over the last several years I have had the opportunity to work as a third grade bilingual teacher in a small elementary school on the south side of the city. Pursuing graduate studies and teaching at the same time has provoked me to examine my teacher beliefs and process, primarily as a teacher of writing and reading of minority language and culture children. This exploration has lead me to several possible insights about how one might most effectively structure literacy instruction with the goal of supporting the development of critical literacy. Two previous research case studies that I carried out over the last three years have helped to create a foundation from which I now planned to examine children's processes as developing writers in greater detail.

From the first study carried out during the spring of 1995, I gained insights into
children's own purposes and intentions for writing. This resulted in my restructuring our Writing Workshop into a Writer's Workshop in order to provide extensive self-directed writing time, as well as autonomy over the product selection by the students.

The second study, carried out from early fall of 1995 until late spring of 1996, further informed me of the powerful effects of peer collaboration during writing. This study also encouraged me to more closely examine my students' literacy development.

Considerations from an Earlier Case Study

In my bilingual third grade classroom, during the school year 1995-1996, I had the opportunity to learn from a student, newly arrived from Mexico, who shared with us his own idiosyncratic notions of literacy. Manuel knew himself to be a fine writer, because he had great stories to tell. This self-perception was not dimmed by his own awareness of his lack of literacy skills, which he defined as transcribing. Indeed, Manuel knew barely thirteen letters of the alphabet. He became my focus in a case study examining the impact of peer collaboration in Writer's Workshop. I drew a theoretical base from work by Vygotsky (1978) on mediation in the the ZPD and Bozuvich (1967) on the interaction of the personality of schoolchildren and formal schooling, Daiute & Dalton's (1993) research on peer collaboration examining the notion of 'expert' and 'novice', and Davydov's illumination of the foundational philosophy of the Russian school system grounded by Vygotskian principles (Davydov, 1995):

...the following general ideas of Vygotsky are basic...the first idea is that education, which includes both human teaching/learning and upbringing, is intended first of all to develop their personalities. The second idea is that the human personality is linked to its creative potentials, therefore the development of the personality in the education system demands first of all the creation of conditions
for discovering and making manifest the creative potentials of students. The third idea is that teaching/learning and upbringing assume personal activity by students as they master a variety of inner values; the student becomes a true subject in the process of teaching and upbringing. The fourth idea is that the teacher and upbringer direct and guide the individual activity of the students, but they do not force or dictate their own will to them. Authentic teaching/learning and upbringing come through collaboration by adults with children and adolescents. The fifth idea is that the most valuable methods for students' teaching/learning and upbringing correspond to their developmental and individual particularities, and therefore these methods cannot be uniform. (p. 13)

The interactive process of working with his peers in Writer's Workshop proved to be a transformative process, not only for Manuel, but for his collaborators as well. Key characteristics of these interactions point directly to the third and fifth ideas of Vygotsky as explained by Davydov. The third idea addresses the concept of student as subject of his own learning through "personal activity ...as they master a variety of inner values" (V. V. Davydov, 1995, p. 13) and delineates the relationship between personal purpose and practice. Manny participated in the social process of sharing his life and experiences with his peers through the medium of print. As he gained personal awareness of the power of print, this awareness became the personal driver for his continued participation: he shared not only in the activity, but also in the classroom valuing of writing. Students' frequent comments regarding the value of print include: it lasts, you can falsify it, you can come back and change it later, you can make things turn out the way you want, you can make up anything, people will read it.

The fifth point put forth by Davydov (1995) addresses the concept that the individual nature of coming to know correspond(s) to their developmental and individual
particularities, and therefore these methods cannot be uniform." (p.13)

Manny had several characteristics that contributed to the effectiveness of peer collaboration. He had good self concept and he perceived of himself as a good writer, because he had good stories to tell. The method of transcribing, that he had to work on. Additionally, he actively sought out the kinds of supportive interactions with teacher and peers that facilitated his learning because he had a personal purpose for writing.

These ideas, drawn from Vygotsky, of collaboration among children and adults in personally active and meaningful contexts in an environment geared toward the expression of creative potentials, have guided my role as a teacher/collaborator ever since.

**Defining Critical Literacy**

The issue of critical literacy is one I have wrestled with over the last ten years, both as a teacher of young children, and as a mother. My definition of critical literacy has become refined over the last several years of study. Initially I framed critical literacy in a pragmatic fashion drawing from my earlier understanding of Freire (1973) as the use of print in (pragmatically) transformative ways. In this definition, the farmer who writes down the names of the crops that fail transforms his existence by planting successful crops the following year. Later, through my studies of children writing, I came to understand critical literacy as an almost exclusively personal process, by which my students through their interactions with print were able to reflect on their own lives and those of the writing community, consider possible lives and outcomes, and create change. As I have continued to investigate the notion of critical consciousness, I have come to understand critical literacy as quite paradoxically simultaneously spiritual and pragmatic in nature. Critical
literacy requires *critical consciousness* --a way of coming to know, a breakthrough experience Freire likened to religious conversion, an awareness and desire to think and act critically. However, the signs of critical literacy are as diverse and idiosyncratic as the contexts in which it arises. The students in this study demonstrated critical literacy in myriad ways in which they used print. They wrote to impress and display privileged information, to reflect on and share out-of-school experiences, and to participate in each other’s lived. They wrote to entertain, to apologize, and to brag. Their developing critical literacy was also revealed in the processes they used to participate as members of the writing community. In order to participate in the social process of sharing texts, students employed equally imaginative methods for creating texts, copying each other’s personal narratives, creating lists of words gleaned from classroom print, occasionally plagiarizing paragraphs from published children’s books.

**Situating Myself as the Researcher**

My daughter spent a glorious kindergarten year with a dynamic and supremely caring teacher for whom I will always be grateful. For Aurora, that kindergarten year was spent in enthusiastic sharings of who she was, and what her interests and dreams were. An intensely verbal child, she was given opportunities to share her descriptions and commentary on her experiences, and to participate as a listener in the lives of her classmates and teacher. Ms. Stephany once shared with me, ‘well, we never got to Math (or some subject area) today, because Aurora regaled us with her retelling of the Nutcracker Suite and it was just too wonderful to stop."

First grade came and again Aurora rode off on the yellow bus, filled with
anticipation and excitement about the mysteries of reading and writing that awaited her. She was ready to join the literacy club (Smith, 1985). This time, entrance was not to prove easy. One day in early October she arrived home quiet and remote. Dumping her backpack by the door, she ignored my questions about her day. Jammed into her backpack were two pieces of writing. One said, "I have a cat." The word 'have' had been written and rewritten many times and the multiple erasures had worn a hole in the paper. This sentence was ringed in bright green ink and festooned with a smiley face. The second paper had two sentences. 'i lc u' and "I hv a rt dz akrobtx". Both of these sentences were also ringed with bright green ink but festooned with double questionmarks.

"Ro", I said, "did you do two pieces of writing today?"

"No", she said, "the cat one's John's."

"Did everybody write about their pets today?"

"No", she said, her voice thick with scorn, "John doesn't even have a cat."

"Where did he get the idea from, do you think?"

"From the words on the wall."

"What shall we do with your writing?"

"Throw it away."

It's not so much the words on the wall that bothered me then, and still does now, but rather the privilege accorded those teacher-selected words that rendered Aurora's and the other children's 'stories to tell' valueless in the classroom context. It is unbearable that her teacher wasn't intrigued to learn about Aurora's beloved rat Minieux who did acrobatics by crossing hand over hand from one side of the wire cage to other. It is still
more unbearable to have ignored 'I like you." Aurora was indeed silenced. Her year-end First Grade report card described her as incoherent.

As a teacher of minority language/culture children, I worry about my students' entrance into the literacy club. Over the last decade or so I have spent a lot of time trying to figure out what I needed to do to foster the literacy development of my students. They came to school full of knowledge that meshed poorly with the mainstream educational goals and instruction. Their literacy experiences and expectations rarely paralleled the experiences of their majority culture peers; the traditions of story telling and uses of print in their communities were often in conflict with the 'privileged forms of discourse' (Gee, 1996) honored in the school. Early reading instruction, however gamely attempting to provide a balance of 'word attack strategies': semantic, phonetic, and syntactic somehow only served to emphasize the discrepancy between what they knew, and what they apparently needed to know. In terms of phonics, lists of word families presented my LEP students with a daunting memory task as lop, mop, hop, cop were for them essentially meaningless segments, rather than clues to a system of writing/reading. Syntax provided as little entree into the world of meaning. The irregular grammatical structures of English could not be counted on to flesh out the meaning of 'predictable' reader series. Consider the following two pieces of text I fabricate here to illustrate the kinds patterned language typical of these books written expressly to developing predictive strategies of emergent readers:

Last week we ran and played and swam, the monkey said to

Sam. This week we'll ____ and ____ and ____ the
monkey said to him. 

Semantic information within the text similarly left my students in the dark. A cloze text, such as:

d the tiny mouse said, please...

give me a nice big piece of ... (cheese)

similarly does little to enhance the creation of meaning if, as in the cultural context of my Cambodian students, a mouse eats rice.

Reading-based methods of facilitating literacy development, however holistically seated, were still somehow too connected to the information-transmission philosophy of teaching. The ability to 'get' the meaning in books was not a personally transformative process for my students. Their lives, their experiences were not to be found, even in our extensive multicultural classroom library. Almost frantically they searched the illustrations for any people of color, looking for specific details in the text that might proclaim out loud who they were, and make their lives visible. They were the silent culture (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

I came away from reading as the foundation of literacy instruction and began to focus on a writing-reading connection. The notion that everyone has a story to tell became the platform for a writing workshop based on the work of Graves (1983), Calkins (1986) and others. Over the last few years the writing process in the classroom has undergone several transformations. As students participated fully in writing and sharing their lives, the very knowledge and experiences that had meshed so poorly with the mainstream educational goals and instruction became itself our curriculum. We became
members of a Writer's Workshop, because we were the subjects of our learning. Patterns of culturally privileged discourse shared the stage with other culturally influenced ways of making meaning. My students' voice was finally heard. And with the sounds of their own voices in our ears, perhaps the fruit of emancipatory education will set.

Today, as I watch and share in Writer's Workshop with my students I am again provoked to examine my notions regarding literacy acquisition. I have been concerned with the development of students' voice in the classroom, using Writer's Workshop as our leaping-off place. In focussing on the student interactions with the end product, I have failed to notice the sociocultural process of composing: of being and becoming a writer.

The Conflicts of Role as a Teacher Researcher

As this study progressed, I became increasingly aware of the effect my role as the classroom teacher had on my research. This effect was at least twofold. On one hand, the authenticity of my place in the room was not in question. It was my job to be there, in the eyes of my students, and therefore my interest in their writing became part of our normal classroom process, rather than a disruption to the normal activity. The relationships that my students entered into with me were in part facilitated by their expectations over the years of schooling for interaction with a classroom teacher. Unlike a participant-observer, I did not have to create a special relationship with them, nor they with me, in order to pursue my investigation. In fact, the very closeness of the friendships I enjoyed with my students created opportunities for them to share the personal layers of experience that prompted their texts.

I was also involved in the lives of my students beyond the constraints of the typical
school experience in a way that certainly impacted on my relationship with them and their families. We were able to bring my sister, Susannah Israel, to Tucson where she created a huge mural with the third-graders on the west-facing wall of the school, and after her month-long stay, my colleagues and I spent many late afternoons finishing up the painting. We were shameless in soliciting the help of anybody who happened by the playground—outfitting passersby with paintbrushes and garbage-bag smocks, including strolling parents, uncles who came to play basketball, and stray children who'd come for the swings and the teeter-totter. In this distinctly non-teacher role, I was able to meet parents and the children in a non-hierarchical context. In paint-splattered clothes outside the classroom walls I could step outside the constraints of my professional role and become 'just another person'. I also frequently spent Saturday mornings doing classroom preparation at the school, and the visibility of my car in the empty parking lot would quickly draw a number of my students from the area neighborhoods. They would often join me in organizing books, sorting papers, and just as frequently ask to use poster paints and butcher paper to make paper murals on the sidewalk. When my own children joined us on occasional Saturdays my students managed to negotiate the boundaries of parent-teacher-child relationships, the hierarchies of who-belongs-to-whom, and raced off to play soccer in the field behind the school. In short, we came to know each other very well. I very much doubt that the level of sharing I experienced with my students could be reproduced if I had been a participant-observer. The success of the visiting researcher depends upon the willingness and ability of children to suspend their awareness of the norm, to enter into willing disbelief, and to behave 'as if' the constructed relationship is commonplace.
On the other hand, I was very conscious of being first and foremost the teacher. There were many instances in which my role as teacher precluded my role as researcher. These were ‘teachable moments’ that required I drop my note-taking pen and join the class in examining writing topic or purpose, where I was called in to mediate a conflict of authorship, or to play the role of expert as I dispensed spelling, punctuation hints, and received writing. There were also occasional conversations with students in which the topic of the interaction around writing was born of our relationship. I was not able to betray that primary relationship and take notes. In some instances I later reconstructed the interaction as best I could. In other instances I had to let what I felt to be significant data go uncollected. In spite of the drawbacks of the dual teacher-researcher role, I believe wholeheartedly in the importance of studies conducted by classroom teachers. In a context so bounded by those relationships, based on the history of educational experience and expectation, shared teacher and student insights contribute powerfully to the body of literature seeking to address the notions of collaboration and affect that frame classroom practice. I have learned much from the studies by Edelsky (1986), Dyson (1989, 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1995, 1997a, 1997b), Newkirk (1992), Schultz (1997), and others who play active roles as participant observers. However, as a practitioner, I have been deeply affected by the power of teacher-research studies such as those by Lewis (1993) and Bean (1997), power that is constructed in part by the intimacy of the shared teacher-student relationship in the historically situated and bounded context of the classroom.

Overview of the Following Chapters

The preceding prologue and Chapter One have provided the background to the
study, sharing the personal and professional history that contributes to my philosophical orientation as a researcher, discussing the challenges of the dual teacher-researcher role, and defining key terms of the study. Chapter Two will present a review of the research that provided the original platform for this investigation: contrasting theories of learning from both a Vygotskian and a Piagetian perspective, and considering the research arising from these paradigms. Issues of authenticity, race, critical theory, and pedagogy will be examined in the literature, and will be addressed as significant strands of inquiry throughout the study. Chapter Three will provide descriptions of the research environment, methods of data collection and analysis, tables of the distribution of data across cases, as well as a discussion of the problems I faced in adjusting my intentions for the study to reality. Chapter Four will provide an empirical and theoretical framework for considering the case studies. In this chapter I will discuss the evolution of Writer's Workshop from a writing workshop, address the notion of writing as a tool for empowerment, and consider a pedagogical reorientation from the teaching of writing to the teaching of writers. Finally, I will address peer collaborations as a significant feature of liberatory literacy experiences, examining in particular the effectiveness of the student-facilitated zones of proximal development. Chapters Five, Six and Seven will present the data in the form of three specific case studies centered around the three target children. These narratives follow their literacy development over the course of a year in my classroom and chronicle their remarkable achievements as critical thinkers and writers. In Chapter Eight I will present a discussion of the study, focusing on the notion of Writer's Workshop as a liberatory practice, and develop the notion of a pedagogy of collaboration
practice, and develop the notion of a pedagogy of collaboration as a significant factor in the literacy development of the case study children. I will contrast this pedagogy to the pedagogy of institutionalized individualism (Stanton-Salazar, 1997) that characterizes mainstream schooling. In Chapter Nine I address a pedagogy of collaboration as the manifestation of a philosophical orientation requiring critical consciousness on the part of the teacher, and a commitment to demystifying standard school practices. I identify and discuss the elements of community, voice, purpose, conversation, collaboration, and shared texts that characterized our Writer’s Workshop, and framed it as an arena of liberatory practice. Chapter Ten is an epilogue written after I met with the case study subjects almost a full year after the study was completed. It describes the devastating effects on the development of the case study children as they entered classrooms more concerned in remediating their weaknesses than in supporting their strengths.
CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH REVIEW

Chapter Two presents a review of the research, beginning with the examination of a Vygotskian theory of learning in critical opposition to the perspectives of Piaget. The Vygotskian concepts of the zone of proximal development, and the significance of dynamic assessment are then examined, as well as the resultant implications for instruction. The following section will present a review of the research in literacy education based on a Vygotskian framework, addressing the role of the affect as investigated by Bozuvich and Luria. This review will focus on research investigations of children in socioculturally situated studies. The invalidity that results from repositioning research originally operating from a Vygotskian framework into a Piagetian framework will be examined. Several studies that investigating the ZPD as a construct for organizing instruction will be reviewed, and, finally, discourse as an element of sociocultural contexts in learning will be discussed. This following section will discuss the central concepts of critical pedagogy, and will address the limitations of a culturally, socio-politically unsituated whole language philosophy as a tool for fostering critical learning. The notion of collected personal histories as a social history, and the role of collected personal histories in the classroom will also be examined as tools for demystifying literacy instructional practices. Finally, a framework situating whole language within a critical pedagogy will be proposed as a significant reorientation of literacy education.

A Vygotskian Theory of Learning

The Vygotskian theory of learning is presented here, in critical opposition to the perspectives of Piaget. The Vygotskian concepts of the zone of proximal development.
and the significance of dynamic assessment are then examined, as well as the resultant implications for instruction.

**Vygotsky in Critical Opposition to Piaget**

Vygotsky is critical of the distorting effects on theory building that stem from Piaget's culturally, politically, historically unsituated studies. Vygotsky (1986) posits that the very absence of an overt philosophical position is in itself a philosophy:

> Piaget tried to avoid generalizing, careful not to go into the related realms of logic, cognition and of philosophy; empiricism appears to be the only safe ground. Piaget tried to hide behind the wall of facts...but the facts are always examined in the light of some theory, and therefore cannot be disentangled from philosophy. (p.15)

Vygotsky articulates further the limiting impact of the assumed neutrality of 'scientific' inquiry that characterizes traditional psychology (and, I would add, educational research), and the resultant inflexibility in the formulation of theory. He is scornful of what he characterizes as Piaget’s arbitrary separation of philosophy and psychology, and deeply critical of Piaget’s insistence on the scientific nature of his studies. Vygotsky rejects the Piaget’s claim to the role of objective researcher and questions the notion that such a position is either possible or desirable. Vygotsky, in part defining his theory of learning in opposition to Piaget’s theories of learning, begins by locating his investigations within a cultural, sociopolitical, historical context. Vygotsky argued that the normative stages Piaget claimed universal were ungeneralizable outside of the original cultural context. Vygotsky strongly resisted the notion that generalizability was a desirable outcome of research (1986):
The developmental uniformities established by Piaget apply to the given milieu, under the conditions of Piaget’s study. They are not laws of nature, but are historically and socially determined. (p. 55)

Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development: Socially Mediated Learning

The philosophical perspective, therefore, of embeddedness of thought, in the ‘fullness of life, personal needs, interests, inclinations, and impulses of the thinker’ can be seen as the impetus for the examination of the developing cognitive process in context. Arising from this perspective, which can be seen in direct opposition to the notion of egocentricity, led Vygotsky to the concept of the ZPD, a hypothetical zone of development located between the tasks a child can successfully complete on own, and the tasks he is capable of achieving in interaction with an expert. This concept is at odds with the notion of universal stages of development and to the Piagetian perspective of the child as ‘impervious to experience’, for in this model a child’s achievements depend largely on the nature of his mediated experiences, rather than on a developmental timeline. Berk & Winsler (1995) elaborate on the interaction of the two lines of development described by Vygotsky:

The natural line, refers to biological growth and maturation of physical and mental structures. The cultural line refers to learning to use cultural tools and to human consciousness, which emerges from engaging in cultural activity. (p. 5)

In this paradigm, the cultural contexts of the child are highly significant, as they both determine and define the nature of experiences a child may have, as well as the cultural significance placed on these experiences. Vygotsky (1978) viewed the child as a consummately socially determined being:
The internalization of the socially rooted and historically developed activities is the distinguishing feature of human psychology, the basis of the qualitative leap from animal to human psychology. (p. 57)

Thus, the child is viewed as a sociocentric rather than egocentric being (Newkirk, 1989; Dyson, 1993). As Newkirk further points out, a Vygotskian perspective allows us to take a resource model approach to the cultural diversity of schoolchildren (Newkirk, 1989).

Vygotsky’s concept of language as a cultural tool has been so influential because it avoids the anomalies of the dominant universal models of development. For one thing, it accounts for cultural differences in cognition. Different cultures offer up different tools—different ways of conversing, different ways of reading, different ‘ways with words’—which members of these cultures then internalize. If we view all humans as progressing through universal, invariable stages, a divergence from this norm is classified easily as deficit (p. 137).

**Dynamic Assessment in the ZPD: Explanation versus Description**

Vygotsky perceived the legitimate assessment of cognitive abilities in children to face two separate and problematic obstacles. Firstly, Vygotsky (1978, 1986) was concerned with the possibility of missing the significant etiology of learning behaviors, if the research focus was on the outward expression of fossilized behaviors. He pointed out that phenotypically identical processes could have markedly different genetic causes. He termed fossilized behaviors those psychological processes that have become internalized through repetition and are now automatic, thus the development of the process is now obscured by the current form of the behavior. Vygotsky returned to his fundamental philosophy of the historiographical roots of learning in order to address this problem and devised what he termed the ‘genetic method’. In order to examine the learning in motion,
Vygotsky designed experimental situations in which the child’s process would be evoked by the interaction of a task slightly above the child’s current problem solving capabilities, and the introduction of a mediating stimulus as a cultural tool. Vygotsky’s (1978) “functional method of double stimulation” (p. 74) provided a window into the child’s cognitive process. Thus, the methodology of dynamic assessment became a foundation for Vygotsky’s approach to the study of cognition.

Let us now consider an alternative paradigm characterized by the elements foregrounded by a Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of learning: “the children”, socially situated studies, children as sociocentric actors, and the context specificity of the learning environment.

**Research in a Vygotskian Framework**

This section will present a review of the research from a Vygotskian framework, touching on the role of the affect as investigated by Bozuvich and Luria. Research will be considered from the perspective of investigations of children in socioculturally situated studies. The invalidity that results from repositioning research originally operating from a Vygotskian framework into a Piagetian framework will be examined. Several studies that investigate the ZPD as a construct for organizing instruction will be reviewed, and, finally, discourse as an element of sociocultural contexts in learning will be discussed.

**Reorienting the Research: A Move Away From Universals**

Consider, in light of Vygotsky’s arguments against the notion of universal stages of development, Sulzby’s (1986) position that the variation in forms observed in children’s writing preclude the possibility of a developmental sequence, and her subsequent rejection
of the comparative model employed to describe and understand child process (Sulzby, 1986):

I argue that children’s theories are not organized like adult conventional knowledge, thus the interactive theories have the wrong details for a picture of young children, even though the idea of parallel levels of processing appears to be sound. (p.53)

A subtle shift is suggested in her call for the reconsideration of the orientation of the model for investigation, from a position of abstracting the child’s performance as it correlates to adult performance, to a descriptive model situated in the contexts and purposes of the child. The distinction in orientation is subtle, yet the implications of such a paradigm shift are profound and far-reaching. Sulzby’s (1986) position is that the variation in forms observed in children’s writing precludes the possibility of a developmental sequence. Rather, the paradigm whereby children’s print processes are compared to adult processes creates a bias toward identifying a taxonomic progression. This can be seen as a rejection of the Piagetian notion of universal stages of development and the notion of equilibrium/disequilibrium, which is seen to arise from a cognitive framework within the child, and dependent upon internal characteristics (Piaget, 1954).

The Interaction of the Affect and Cognitive Development

The significance of the relationship of the affect to cognitive development addressed by Vygotsky, became the focus of work for his student, L.I. Bozuvich (1967), who investigated the interaction of a child’s personality, and the demands of schooling. By centering her studies of the child on his interactions with family as a source of status building, she was drawing on Vygotsky’s perspective of the inherently social nature of
children, further elaborated by Luria (1969):

Vygotsky expressed the idea which he often repeated that the child is from the very beginning a social being, association with his family is from the very beginning a basic form of the child’s basic vital activity. (p. 127)

Bozuvich further extended the investigation of the impact of interactions within the family on the child’s personality, to include school contexts, in order to identify factors influencing the academic success of young children in formal schooling. She discovered that the over-riding influential relationship impacting children’s interactions with each other and the school environment was that of the student and the teacher. In identifying the factors influencing academic success, Bozuvich looked to the personality characteristics of the child, which she described as significantly mediating the influence of the environment (Bozuvich, 1967):

Thus it is not enough to look at the objective content of the environment. The main task is to find the crucial link which defines the influence exerted on the child by his environment. (p. 212)

Bozuvich also noted that while social needs provide the greatest motivation for attention to tasks, the child is often not conscious of the source of personal motivation. Citing Vygotsky’s notion of ‘internalized rules’—that a game rule is an internalized rule, and as such, not a rule the child is forced to obey—Bozuvich recommended that children’s activities be structured in such a way that they coincide with the children’s own goal. This grounding of instruction in both the notion of the significance children’s own purposes, and awareness of the driving motivation of social relationships in cognitive endeavors is in
accordance with contemporary studies in sociocultural aspects of learning.

A Sociocultural Perspective of Learning: Cultural Contexts, Social Interactions, And the Notion of Children

Clotilde Pontecorvo (1993) points out the significance of the specific people involved in communicative interactions, and the impact of social relations on the type of cognitive activity in which the protagonists are engaged. The cultural context consists not only of immediate characteristics of the environment, but also of the intentions and interactions of those within the context. Investigations of the “child”, therefore, cannot be meaningfully decontextualized from their setting.

Anne Haas Dyson (1994) illuminates the possibilities for a pedagogy that foregrounds real children in real contexts. She points to the problematic pattern of basing our understandings on the “constructed child” (Dyson, 1994):

...the myth of the child [writer] who lives without a gender, race, class, or any other significant collective relationship, other perhaps than age. (p. 2)

Dyson believes that the investigative focus on ‘the child’ is an attempt to create research uncontaminated by sociocultural effects. She posits that the inattention to the cultural contexts and children’s purposes prevents researchers from recognizing the cognitive impact of children’s social lives.

Conflicting Paradigms and Unexpected Orthodoxy in Child-Centered Study: Applying Piaget in A Vygotskian Framework

Donald Graves (1983) sought to bring child-centered perspectives of whole language into the writing curriculum. From his years spent observing what children did
while writing in a white, middle-class New England elementary school, Graves created the 'writing workshop'. This workshop was based on the elements of process writing—prewriting, writing, revision, editing, sharing, and presenting written texts to an audience—that are routinely ascribed to expert writers. Writing conferences with the teacher were of central importance to the molding of child performance in writing workshop, and were intended to scaffold the instructional conversations of teacher-student on the familiar patterns of parent-child conversations. Based on Graves' earlier study, Lucy Calkins (1986) developed further instructional recommendations for improving student writing based on her subsequent studies of elementary school children of varied cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. The assumed parallels of the writing conference to parent-child interactions were not reevaluated in light of the new sociocultural contexts, and remained a central feature of Calkins' new studies with students of diverse cultural backgrounds. However, the instructional dialogs which were at the heart of Writing Workshop reflect a characteristic linguistic pattern of mainstream white culture, and the form of socially privileged discourse valued and promoted by schools (Gee, 1995; Heath, 1983; Michaels, 1981). Within the specific context of the classrooms Graves observed, the conferences might have served to facilitate student learning. However, for children of other linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the inexplicit protocols for information sharing and display simply mark yet another discontinuity between school expectation, and other ways of knowing. Because the mainstream cultural context in which the Writing Workshop was seated were perceived as neutral, the ways Graves saw children write, in the hands of subsequent researchers, unfortunately became a prescription for the ways
children should write (Dyson, 1993). Writing Workshop, decontextualized from its original setting, 'has become an inflexible orthodoxy, handed down from on high, written on tablets of stone (Fox, 1993).

The Zone of Proximal Development as a Research Construct

In her carefully situated studies, Dyson (1993) investigated the collaborative nature of children’s own writing process. She saw the child writers as meaning negotiators and social actors. She observed them to create text worlds through social interaction, and to create social worlds through their interactions with text. As children collaborated to produce writing to share what Dyson termed 'performance pieces', they participated in collaborative zones of proximal development. The ZPD was further facilitated by their teacher, who, rather than directing the children’s process, participated with them to make explicit the types of sharing they were by personal choice, engaged in. This teacher role is similar to that observed in a study by Moll (1994) of outstanding Latino teachers whose practice incorporated whole class engagement. Moll observed teachers to create collective zones of proximal development for the students by providing them with opportunities to discuss the subject under study.

In an earlier study investigating instructional methodologies to address a home-school culture connection for minority language and culture children, Moll and Greenberg (1990) implemented Vygotsky’s concept of the ZPD. While Vygotsky clearly indicated a hierarchy of cognitive functioning in the distinction he made between the two forms of scientific versus spontaneous concepts, he also emphasized the role of spontaneous thought in the mediation of the acquisition of schooled concepts. Thus, in the study of
incorporating the home culture into literacy instruction, Moll and Greenberg (1990) focused on their concept of funds of knowledge, “an operations manual of essential information and strategies households need to maintain their well being” (p. 323), which represented culturally embedded and relevant spontaneous concepts. They made several observations regarding the transfer of these funds of knowledge within families. The zones of proximal development were the result of activity between children and adults; they were initiated by the children’s interest, and were not necessarily seen as productive interactions by the adults. Indeed, one parent in offhandedly dismissing her child’s imitative but messy experiments with motor repair, “he just likes to make a pig of himself” (Moll and Greenberg, 1990 p.324). In this study, two separate approaches were designed to bring the community funds of knowledge into the classroom. In the first, resources and tools were provided for the case-study child to develop and display her increasing competence as she moved through a zone of proximal development toward the acquisition of schooled concepts. In the second study, teachers formed relationships with parents that allowed them to investigate and bring into the school the local funds of knowledge, and to invite parents to participate as experts in the area of study.

Gallimore and Tharpe (1990) also conducted related studies, in which the local funds of knowledge were integrated into school curriculum. Whereas in the Moll and Greenberg (1990) studies, the culturally influenced concepts were content based, in the Gallimore and Tharp study, the discourse styles of the local community, (process-based concepts) were appropriated and became the basis for instructional dialogues intended to scaffold children’s development of higher order thinking. The concept of cognitive
structuring, that is, the organization of similar content or contexts to provide a layering of experiences, was developed to promote student discussions that would act as a zone of proximal development for all. That is, that expectation was that the discontinuity of home-school discourse could be minimized through the acquisition of school discourse by those students less familiar with the discourse, in conversation with those classmates who had already acquired it.

**Discourse as an Element of Sociocultural Contexts in Learning**


> Bakhtin's insistence that texts are embedded in social dialogue and his description of their multivocal qualities (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986) is critical to an understanding of writing as a collaborative activity. (p. 256)

Thralls (1992) also applies the concept of collaborative process in communication, to writing. She advances the definition of collaboration to include both direct verbal interactions, as well as the notion of cultural collaboration, "to recognize the social sphere of voices that inform and limit expression." (p. 77)

The recognition of this social sphere of voices calls us to examine the influences outside the classroom that have an impact on the interactions within. Gee (1996) and Michaels (1981) examined the effects of cultural discontinuity between the discourse practices of a young student and the expectations for literate behavior of her teacher. The child was effectively prevented from participating in any meaningful verbal exchange while
the teacher was present. Indeed, the story-tellings that illustrate the contrast between the child's form and intentions for sharing time with the teacher expectations were transcribed only because the teacher was called out of the room and the child was therefore allowed without interruption to complete her story. In response to the collision between the valued forms of discourse experienced by the child of Michaels' study, and for many speakers of non-mainstream dialects, both Heath and Street (cited in Gee, 1995) call for schools to provide literacy instruction aimed at socializing non-mainstream children into the discourse practices that advantage mainstream children for literacy instruction. They present as primary the need for an instructional focus that serves to inculcate children into the social practices and discourses of power (R.L. Collins, 1993; Ogbu, 1994).

Not only do schools require the use of mainstream discourse that is often at odds with the 'ways with words' of other culture group, the discourse patterns of schools additionally require children to internalize the artificial and idiosyncratic features of teacher-student interactions. These include the recitation script, the three-part question, and the required verbal response to known answer questions (Gallimore and Tharp, 1988; Mehan, 1991). These tacit features belong to the artificial patterns of interaction that characterize the culture of the classroom in mainstream schools, and ostensibly present obstacles to the academic success of all students. Mehan (1991) further observed the mismatch of home-school discourse features of low-income and linguistic minority youth, and noted that when these discrepancies are not made explicit, even child-centered instructional models fail to place the minority culture and language child in the center.

Ogbu (1994) differentiates between minority groups according to their voluntary
versus involuntary status as minorities and posits for each, different obstacles to academic access. Involuntary minorities, African American, Native American and Hispanic are among the most academically disadvantaged groups as a result of their minority status. For voluntary minorities for whom full assimilation is a possibility, cultural linguistic differences are an obstacle to be overcome. For involuntary minorities, the collective identity may well be formed in opposition to mainstream culture.

Oppositional identity internalized by minorities makes them consciously and unconsciously interpret learning Standard English and school related aspects of mainstream culture as learning to act like their oppressors, their enemies, white Americans, and therefore as threatening to their collective identity, and therefore resist this learning...to be successful is to be white. (Ogbu, 1994 p. 377)

Thus, if involuntary minorities are to gain access to socially privileged discourse, Ogbu cites the need for instruction aimed at demystifying which learning actually leads to school success, and which learning has as its goal the acculturation to mainstream ideals.

Werstch (1990) challenges the practice in formal instruction of requiring children to employ a discourse he characterizes as ‘the decontextualized voice of rationality’, which reflects the dominant ideology, which in turn requires a separation of intellect and affect as well as a separation of communicative context and semantic content. Werstch (1990) elaborates:

...research suggests that a great deal of the activity of formal instruction focuses on encouraging children to master discourse grounded in decontextualized forms of representation... even when other forms of representing the object and operations at issue would do equally well, or better. One of the messages of formal schooling is that, whenever possible, one should privilege decontextualized rational modes of discourse over others. (p. 121)
Dyson proposes a more radical alternative to the solutions suggested by Heath (1983) and others, that call for the acculturation of minority language and culture children into the discourses of the dominant ideology. Dyson (1993) eloquently calls for schools to enter into cultural negotiations with children. Dyson notes, (1993) that “we need to do more than scaffold children’s entry into the valued ways of society.” (p 216)

Redefining Literacy: Whose Voice, Words, Power?

In this section I will discuss a definition of “literacies” that places the mainstream definition based on dominant practices into a perspective that embraces multiple ‘ways with words’ (Heath, 1983). I will then address the notion of authenticity as it pertains to both the issues of student voices, as well as instructional practice.

From Monolithic Literacy to Multiple Literacies: Creating Room for Voices

What is literacy? Jenny Cook-Gumperz (1986) noted that literacy has been redefined in the dominant paradigm as schooled literacy, that is, a series of decontextualized skills, based on instruction organized according to measurable objectives. Within the paradigm created by such a definition, there is little room to consider cultural perspectives. How can we reconcile the multiple ‘ways with words’ into a definition of literacy that aligns with a Vygotskian perspective of language as a cultural tool? Flower (1994) suggests a construct for the inclusion of multiple literate perspectives with her term ‘limited literacies’. These would include the entire spectrum of literacy activities across class and culture. From a pragmatic stance, one can hardly discount the importance of access to culturally privileged forms of discourse. Flower
(1994) problematizes the privileged literacy forms, (which are but a small piece in the larger puzzle of literate practices). She explains (Flower, 1994):

[These forms] aspire to the status of a generic term... And even more problematic, limited literacies, like the pedagogy of correctness, solidify their position by posing as a necessary foundation, the basic skills, which must be in place before other literacies can develop...The ritual public discourse of literacy has failed to put these limited literacies in perspective. (p. 14)

If we are to promote the use and access to multiple literacies, we must find a way to both limit the imperialism of the discourses of power, and simultaneously, make its forms explicit and accessible. Gee (1993) presents two conceptual principles that govern ethical human discourse, (parentheses in original):

1. That something would harm someone else (deprive them of what they or the society they are in view as goods) is always a good reason (although perhaps not a sufficient one) not to do it. (p. 292)

2. One always has the (ethical) obligation to (try to) explicate (render overt and primary) any theory that is (largely tacit and either removed or deferred when there is reason to believe that the theory advantages oneself or one’s group over other people or other groups. (p. 293)

On personal level, therefore, we must become cognizant of our own literacies, and how they are related to the social structures and interactions in which they are situated (Collins, 1995). And secondly, we must become attuned to the multiple ‘ways with words’ and the social practices of others unlike ourselves and seek to understand what they signify. As Gee (1995) eloquently states, “What matters is not the decontextualized ability to read or write, but the social practices into which people are apprenticed as part of a social group.” (p. 57)
The Problem of Authenticity

The whole language approach is based on the notion of personal engagement with literacy in meaningful ways. Thus teachers struggled to provide intrinsically motivating modes of instruction in real contexts. Students write letters and invitations, make personal responses to literature, create their own texts in writing workshop, and invite their families to Author’s Teas. The model of holistic immersion provides the foundation for studies in inquiry based curriculum aimed at extending child centered instruction across the curriculum. as children investigate matters of interest in an academic environment. (Harste, Shorte & Burke, 1992) Yet, framed as it is by the dominant ideology which values certain types of literacy products and processes over other, and privileges some voices over others, the issue of authenticity is problematic. Authenticity is a socially contested term (Gee, 1991). Dyson (1994) cautions against the role of teacher as the provider of authentic purpose, unconsciously driven by mainstream notions of what constitutes valuable learning. In addressing the ‘child’ of instruction, Dyson (1994) notes, “we frame individual children, not with the relations that matter to them, but the relations that matter to us.” (p.7)

Carol Edlesky (1993) identified that students overwhelmingly wrote on implausible teacher-given topics such as letters imaginary characters, and of multiple classroom invitations all written to a single person. She termed these ‘artificial simulations’, and according to her statistics, four hundred out of five hundred pieces of writing fell into this category of writing. Mem Fox also (1996) decries the plethora of inauthentic writing that occupies the majority of literacy experiences. She calculated that her class load of one
hundred and fifty students, who had attended twelve years of school, for approximately forty-two weeks a year, five days a week had created seven hundred and sixty-five thousand pieces of writing, ‘and none of it memorable’. She asserts that ‘let’s pretend isn’t real’, isn’t based on a true interaction with real people, and with real consequences. Authenticity is born in the ‘4 R’s’: ‘relationships’, ‘reality in writing’, ‘rejoicing in choices’, ‘return of the affective’.

Fox contrasts her students’ apathy toward the inauthenticity that characterized the majority of their literacy experiences in school with their level of investment when involved in an authentic writing project, with authentic audience and thus purpose. She described student engagement (Fox, 1993):

Dreading the imminent and real audience galvanized them into quite a different sort of action: they ached with caring about the response, and rehearsed for hours outside class time. My students’ enjoyment of language was extraordinary. I was moved by how happy they were, moved by how hard they worked, and stunned by how much they developed. I realized with grief that purposeless activities and language arts are probably the burial grounds of language development, and that coffins can be found in most classrooms, including mine. (p. 5)

It is important to note that the character of assigned versus unassigned writing is not necessarily a solution to the issue of authenticity. Rather, it’s the level of personal engagement and sense of purpose that brings authenticity to the task. Newkirk (1989) asserts that the problem with assignments stems not from purposelessness of the particular task, or from the notion of imposition on the writer, but from the inauthentic nature of the task. Basalized literature activities in reading and writing are inauthentic, not just because of they are teacher-imposed activities, but because basals do not represent authentic texts.
Edelsky (1993) cites Newkirk as he elaborates on the characteristics of authentic text:

...for creating an authentic text, two things are needed, reading and writing, and print with all systems intact. Authentic reading and writing requires not only a person who uses all cueing systems, but print that offers these systems working interdependently: audience, conditions for view, genre, and intention. (p. 170-173)

Dyson (1989), in her commitment to view children as social actors, focuses sharply on the importance of audience in fostering authentic literacy development. In her studies of young school children, she observed that ‘the audience’ served a variety of functions. Children created social relationships through the creation of their texts, and created their texts through social relationships. In one capacity, the audience served as primary motivator toward the creation of a product as children wrote performance pieces. The children were motivated by the audience, not only as passive consumer of their print, but by the possibility of engendering a reaction in their listeners. The desire to participate in these public literacy events also created an environment where the audience inherent in the child’s social networks, fostered the writing process itself. Children collaborated with peers in the very encoding of their texts, thus expanding their repertoire of writing strategies. And, finally, the notion of audience played a significant role in extending the ways in which children perceived of themselves, as they adapted the themes as well as strategies of their peers into their own writing.

Authenticity enters the whole language program when the very discourses of the children take the floor. When young children’s own writing becomes the primary focus of a literacy program, it brings with it the culturally influenced beliefs, values, goals, intentions, and dreams. Thus the opportunity is presented to enter into a dialog of
possible social worlds with children that begins with them, valuing them and their productions.

Reseating Whole Language in a Critical Pedagogy

This section discusses the central concepts of critical pedagogy, and addresses the limitations of a culturally, socio-politically unsituated whole language philosophy as a tool for fostering critical learning. The notion of collected personal histories as a social history, and the role of collected personal histories is examined as a tool in the process of demystification. Finally, a framework is suggested that situates whole language within a critical pedagogy.

The Central Concepts of a Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy has as its goal, the transformation of the human condition. By rejecting as ‘natural’ the status quo, a critical pedagogy seeks to unravel the sociopolitical layers of cause and effect, and to render visible the ideology that creates the appearance of the immutability of social practice. Critical pedagogy attempts to connect educational practice with social action, creating a pedagogy of praxis, to challenge the hegemony of dominant ideology and the invisibility of its effects. Gadotti states it this way (1996):

The concept of a dialectic is central to the goals of a critical pedagogy, to reveal the interaction between the status quo, and imagined alternatives, between theory and practice, and to open up for consideration the image of what is, and what could be. (p. 7)

Marx was himself critical of schools that existed in name only, rows and rows of children seated at desks, doing nothing, their physical presence merely signaling their statistical attendance. In contemporary stratified society, our schools are not substantially
improving the condition of the population they purport to serve. In order to benefit from federal funding to support public educational programs, schools must demonstrate the lack of achievement of a significant segment of the school population. Overwhelmingly, minority language and culture children fall into this category, and the failure of the schools to educate them is conveniently ascribed to deficiencies located within the child. In this paradigm, attributes such as bilingualism, other types of cultural capital, and experiences beyond those anticipated by the school, are characterized as deficiencies. Furthermore, the minority language and culture children who fail to achieve on a par with their privileged white classmates and enter the workforce further provide, through their labor, the time for the children of the dominant group to study.

A critical pedagogy hopes to counteract the effects of the dominant paradigm by making visible the structural inequality inherent in capitalistic society, thus clearly locating the failure to succeed of non-mainstream children, outside the individual. In the quieting of the dominant voices, comes the opportunity to create possible worlds from the collective experiences of the dominated voices. Giroux (1994, p.) points to the importance of each voice speaking its truth for itself.

More (is required) than recovering or rewriting the repressed histories of the other... (what is required is the) rendering visible how western knowledge is encased in historical and institutional structures that both privilege and exclude particular readings, particular voices, certain aesthetics, forms of authority, representations and modes of sociality.

Thus, it is imperative that all be involved in naming the worlds. Emancipation does not arise from the few naming the world for the many. (Freire & Macedo, 1987)

How Does Whole Language Fit With a Critical Pedagogy?
The whole language philosophy attempts to provide holistic, empowering, and personally meaningful instruction. Yet, framed by hegemonic practice, whole language fails to be emancipatory in practice, for those whose cultural ways of knowing, whose ways with words, differ from the mainstream expectation. The whole language philosophy is framed by language that is whole only for some, whose goals of meaningful discourse provide meaning only for some, and whose commitment to experiential learning builds on personal experience, only for some. Critical pedagogy demands that the teacher and learner become acutely aware of the dynamics of schooling. For the member of the dominating class privilege must be unlearned so that it becomes possible to listen to others. For the member of the dominated class it is necessary to learn how to speak so as to be heard (Giroux, 1981).

A whole language philosophy, reoriented toward unveiling the structural elements that restrict non-mainstream expression, prepared to share the floor with other 'ways with words', committed to re-visioning the narrow dominant cultural definitions of literacy, can be a powerful force in emancipatory education.

In terms of practice, a teacher who wishes to participate in an emancipatory curriculum must be committed to relinquishing the role of sharer of privileged knowledge. Not quite a facilitator, which carries the inherent notion of the holder of knowledge to be transmitted, but rather an advisor, the teacher must be also be committed to participating in a mutually educating dialog with her students. Thomas (1994) describes the necessary orientation of such a teacher:

Such a teacher needs to be informed about the social ground from which students write, a knowledge that needs to come from
(cultural) texts, but also through listening and seeing their own students... Explorations abound, mostly influenced by Freire's dialogic theories of learning which demand of teachers that they constantly interpret and unveil their realities. (p. 113)

By accepting the role of a non-privileged member of the learning community, the teacher is no longer a participant in an inherently disadvantaging, politically driven, educational system. Gadotti (1996) describes the changed role of the teacher in a critical pedagogy:

Teachers must move from being vehicles of cultural transmission which implies a relationship of superiority to the student, to a role in which consciousness of their role in society and in the classroom allows them to choose not to participate as an 'instrument of the elites'. (p. 117)

The role of the teacher in this revision of a whole language pedagogy requires a commitment on a deeply personal level, to examine one's personal ideology, to 'interpret and unveil ones own reality'. Clearly, a critical pedagogist needs to exorcise any belief in the superiority of one's own culture group but even more importantly, one needs to deliberately interact with others on an institutional level in order to counteract hegemony. Catherine Davis (1994, citing Diarmid, Grant and McLoughlin) warns that hegemony cannot effectively be impacted by individual interactions. She advocates instead for measures employed on the level of institutions.

Gadotti (1996) advocates for the establishment of a multicultural curriculum that creates an intertext between what he calls 'first culture' (a concept that corresponds to Vygotsky's 'lived culture'), which includes 'mass culture, and 'elaborated and difficult
cultural forms', (which correspond to Vygotsky's scientific concepts). This multicultural curriculum is characterized by the following tenets outlined by Gadotti (1996), and paraphrased as follows: Such a multicultural curriculum recognizes that cultural diversity is the wealth of humanity, that basic education is the floor, not the ceiling, and that it is directed to all who have not had the advantage of teaching at the right age. It presupposes a link between formal and informal education, makes new links with the community, and foregrounds the municipality as the fundamental actor in the forming of new connections.

Echoing Freire, Gadotti (1996) underscores the significance of hope in the endeavor to reshape cultural realities for the greater actualization of all people, through the joint interactions of the individual and the institution. He calls for a pedagogy that begins in the life story of the individual.

**Personal Histories as Social History**

> Stories are our way of conceiving, or creating: they are the way the imagination works... The plots of life are the plots of literature... Our stories are the vantage points from which we perceive the world and the people in it. (Smith 1990 p 64-65)

> The individual ego is a social construction... to work on a life history is to work on a social history. (Edgerton 1991 p 85, citing Russell Jacoby)

Frank Smith (1990) suggests that our stories are really the recounting of the events of our lives. Embedded, as we are, in a social context, and driven by the ideologies of our society, these stories serve to illustrate our position in place and time. Within the framework of our words, we are culturally, politically, and socially situated.

Thus, the autobiographies of our students also serve as eyes into their world, and
can become a platform for significant exploration of social constructions as they shape all of our lives, and thus our stories. Place becomes symbolic of the context of cultural interactions. A Vygotskian research perspective reveals that research investigations must be situated in the specific geography, space, and time, in order to reveal the significance of the observed interactions to the participants; so too must stories, in order to reveal their true meaning for both the writer and the reader.

Taubman (1993) elaborates on the interaction of three registers in multiethnic and anti-bias education. The 'fictional register' provides an uncritical snapshot that ignores the impact of identity on meaning. The 'communal register' represents the identity that exists in, and is given meaning by, the group. The autobiographical identity is a private and evolving aspect of self. He elaborates on the interaction of these registers Taubman, 1993):

The interaction of these registers provides the framework for autobiographical exploration. The registers must always be kept in dialectic tension so that identity can be investigated and used as a means for exploring and illuminating our experience. (p. 303)

Kincheloe and Pinar elaborate further on the idea of the interaction of sameness and otherness, on the intertwined nature of our constructions of others and of ourselves. Foregrounding self-knowledge as a necessary element of emancipation, they present the autobiography as a both a means and a mediation of critical reflection. The power of critical reflections on life experience to promote personal transformation, with implications for phylogenetic transformations as well, is presented by Pinar (1991):

Our life histories are not liabilities to be exorcised, but are the very precondition for knowing... The situation speaks through the self and
the self through the situation...Autobiographical method can be used to cultivate such attention: to situation as element of self, the self as situation, and the transformation and reconstitution of both.(p. 97)

The Intersection of Whole Language and Critical Pedagogy:
Critical Literacy

Vygotsky believed that the acquisition of cultural meanings by the individual was a creatively transformative process, rather than a model for cultural determinism. Thus the individual's transformation through the acquisition of cultural knowledge and tools resulted in profound ontogenetic as well as phylogenetic benefits, as the creations of the individual served as well to extend the repertoires of the cultural community. Vygotsky also emphasized the necessity of the child to perceive a personal need in writing. Vera John Steiner (1978), in the afterword to Mind In Society, (Vygotsky, 1978) describes effective learning environments as the interaction between the inherent and mutable characteristic of the child with the objective environment. Thus literacy instruction can never be uniform, but must instead be as idiosyncratic as the members of the learning community. Literacy instruction aimed at developing the critical literacy of children is based on the assumptions of increased cultural capital for significant change. Through meaningful creation and discussion of texts, children are facilitated in a zone of proximal development. Wells describes the interaction of talk and text (Wells, 1994):

...the new synoptic mode of construing experience is related to the more familiar dynamic mode, through talk that moves back and forth between the two modes, building bridges between them. (p.8)

How do teachers participate in fostering critical literacy? Mem Fox (1993)
suggests that a key to critical literacy lies in fore-grounding the relationships among teacher and students. Somewhat facetiously she posits for further inquiry the role of love in the mastery of reading. Shared critical reflection has the potential to create waves of profound social change. Sharon Hamilton (1995) sharing her autobiography in My Name’s Not Susie takes a risk unusual in academic arenas. She tells the details of her personal emancipation through literacy, through the retelling of her personal history. In this way she reveals herself to be true to the goals of a critical pedagogy, through her courageous recounting of her painful and alienating childhood, situated in the particular contexts of her life. Through her honest and deeply personal account, she reaches out to those whose condition she knows so well, and by her very example, exhorts them, too, to rise above the seemingly insurmountable material circumstances of their lives. Her document thus becomes more than a personal account, and takes meaning as a chapter in the social history of collective humankind.

After reading her book, a student responds to the text (Hamilton 1995).

I met in this book a person that I already knew, Dr. Hamilton, nice enough, but worldly, scholarly, impressive even among ‘them’. To view this respected figure as a problematic little girl in an orphanage, dirty unpromising, unwanted was, to say the least, an eye opening experience. I was at first shocked, then intrigued, and finally and lastingly, inspired. I don’t know if the wall I created between ‘them’ and ‘us’ will ever fall down, but it has certainly been weakened here.

I don’t know if I’ll ever get to where you are, but knowing you were once where I am makes it seem possible. Maybe I won’t get as far as you are, but I know that the wall is scalable. I feel hope, for myself and for my children.

You mention in your book that your students are free to call you Sharon but that many choose to call you Dr. Hamilton. In the past I chose to call you Dr. Hamilton out of respect for our differences. It is with a sense of pride in our similarities that I will do
continue to address you as Dr. Hamilton.
You ask, “So what? Who cares?”
I do. (p.150-151)

Perhaps through the shared expression of life histories, literacy education can be reoriented into an increasing sum of human possibilities.

**Considerations of Race**

In this last section I will discuss various theoretical frameworks for multicultural education that derive from distinct ideological positions, and their effect on race as a factor in the education of race/ethnic minority children. These include minimizing the significance of race in a multicultural curriculum emphasizing acceptance and acknowledgement, considerations of race and voice, the dialectics of prestige and power as they are connected to race in education, and the demystification of race as central to the notion of shifting location in an ideology of whiteness.

**Multicultural Education: A Forum for All Voices?**

Historically the goal of multicultural curricula has been to include the perspectives and literatures other than the white-middle class experience that characterizes mainstream education. This notion of inclusion has guided the curriculum frameworks of researchers in multicultural education such as Banks (1993) and Cummins (1986), who have sought to create equity through the addition of minority race/ethnic group voices to the mainstream curriculum. Caveats regarding the selection of children’s multicultural literature reflect the concern with maintaining the authenticity of minority voice, indicating consciousness of the tendency of majority voice to overwhelm and appropriate the stories of historically underrepresented people. Along these lines, Day (1994) advises:
Books on minority themes—often hastily conceived—suddenly began appearing in the mid- and late 1960's. Most of these books were written by white authors, edited by white editors and published by white publishers. They often reflected a white middle-class, mainstream point of view. Not until the early 1970's did the children's book world begin to even remotely reflect the realities of a pluralistic society. (p.8)

Although Day alludes to the silencing effect of the power differential on minority race/ethnic group voices, she fails to address the notion of race as more than aspect of ethnic identity. The failure to acknowledge the politics of race relations continues to create an ideological divide among researchers in multicultural education.

**Ideological Differences in Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum**

The ideological divide is manifest in the argument between Shannon (1994) and Harris (1994) in their positions on multicultural literature. Shannon clearly believes he is adopting a pragmatic approach in his perspective on addressing multiculturalism and literature. Shannon (1994) is sensitive to the fears of the population he teaches:

Those earnest, hopeful (mostly) white women wonder how their lives, their teaching, and the literature they use will relate to their students' lives and concerns about multiculturalism...Although some understand multiculturalism as a threat, the majority, while perhaps sympathetic, consider it to be beside the point—affixed, but not central to their development as teachers, or even, as citizens. (p. 1)

However, although Shannon clearly announces awareness of his privileged status as a white male, "I am the canon" (p.1.) he fails to demonstrate critical consciousness of the degree to which the advantages of his whiteness have proportionately disadvantaged non-white groups. He decries the identification of (white) children's literature as the norm, and multicultural children’s literature as "exotic", clearly arguing against the dichotomizing of ‘us’ and ‘them’, yet his impassioned call for equitable treatment does not
acknowledge the political realities of race relations. His emphatic criticism of Harris' choice to publish only the works of minority race/ethnic group authors in her anthology of multicultural children's literature underscores his inability or unwillingness to contextualize multicultural curriculum in the socio-political realities of race relations in the US. He cannot understand how white voice can be excluded from a multicultural anthology. Rather than respond to the voices presented, he balks at the omission of dominant-culture literature. His resistance to the absence of white voices resonates with the fear expressed by opponents of Affirmative Action that any attempt to create equity for the historically disadvantaged necessarily limits opportunities for those historically advantaged.

Unfortunately, Harris' (1994) rebuttal of Shannon's critique does little to further the notion of critical consciousness of race and its relation to multicultural curricula. Whereas Shannon can be criticized for ignoring race in his critiques of cultural hegemony, Harris makes race (decontextualized from the sociocultural arena) the defining feature of her argument. The use of her autobiography to illustrate the power differential of black/white race relations glibly ignores the equalizing effect of her socio-economic status. Harris (1994) assertion that students "had never encountered anyone like me" or "were not only openly hostile to multiculturalism; they were openly hostile to me" (p 10) creates a falsely exotic persona based solely on the notion of her race. Similarly her claims of inferiority status as a black woman fail to address her status as a university professor, and conflict with her observations that "Many [students] did not relish the thought that I had power over them." (p.10)
Problematizing Race

The arguments presented by Shannon and Harris thus represent two perspectives of race as a feature of multicultural education. But, for this discussion to free itself from the static dichotomy of point and counterpoint, it must move beyond the microcosm of singular personal histories, beyond my story versus your story. The dialog must be simultaneously public and private, interpersonal and intrapersonal, personal history resituated in social history. Race must be problematized as a significant factor in education by both whites as well as people of color, in a dialectic that both recognizes and seeks to remedy the patterns of institutionalized racism. In her reflective text on her experiences as the white mother of Black sons, as a white professor of Black literature studies, Lazarre (1996) speaks to the role of white people seeking to join in the dialog.

The whiteness of whiteness is the blindness of willful innocence. It is being oblivious, out of ignorance or callousness or bigotry or fear, to the history and legacy of American slavery; to the generations of racial oppression continuing; to the repeated indignities experienced by Black Americans every single day; to the African cultural heritage which influences every American, long here and newly arrived; to the highly racialized society that this country remains. (p 50)
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

Situating the Classroom: Welcome to Room 209

During the year of the study I was assigned to a monolingual English classroom for the first time in several years (although the classroom complexion will rapidly change over the next few weeks to become a dual language environment). In order to work part-time and remain at the same elementary school, I accepted a monolingual job-share; I taught Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, my teaching partner, Mondays and Tuesdays. Palo Verde School was located on the southern side of the city, the 'other side of the tracks', figuratively speaking. Indeed, Southside City, as the region is now called, was annexed from the city proper several years ago, and the property tax base of the affluent north side no longer supports public education here. Until five years ago Palo Verde was the district's Special Adaptive Instructional Magnet for elementary age special needs students. When overcrowding of the neighborhood elementary schools dictated the need to include regular education classes here, the area boundaries were quickly redrawn to the advantage of the previously existent schools: Palo Verde's students were statistically the most impoverished of the district. The school now housed two classrooms of each grade, K-5, and had been classified as a Chapter One school; approximately 95% of students were considered to be at risk. During the year of my investigation the student population was three percent African-American, eight percent Anglo, three percent Native American/Pacific Islander, and eight-six percent Mexican American.

Palo Verde School drew its population of students from the neighborhoods
directly to the west and south of the school. Most of the families lived in old, singlewide mobile homes haphazardly clustered into dusty trailer parks. A few families had moved into new rent-controlled apartment complexes. It was an area characterized by poverty and violence and unrest. Gang activities left their mark in graffiti and drive-by shootings. During home visits children showed me the bullet holes in the trailers next door. When the bullets came through their own windows, the lucky ones moved, sometimes back across the border to Mexico, more often to neighborhoods to the east and north. Thus, Palo Verde School was notorious for the transitional nature of its student body. Names crossed out or squeezed between the lines of the class rosters recorded the coming and going of students into our classroom. Five months into the school year only twelve of our original twenty in our class were still enrolled. Four students who had attended the previous year never attended the current year. Five more students moved to other neighborhoods before the end of the second quarter. One student joined us from another city. And, in an unprecedented building move, five students joined us from the bilingual classroom next door. We stood at eighteen.

On that first day of school, I surveyed this year's classroom with something akin to dismay. I sensed no quickly formed community here. The students were perched on the edge of their seats, poised for fight or flight. They quickly marked off their territory with sticky name labels. One student's anxiety stood out in particular—Tenaya. Tenaya's sense of membership in the classroom was tenuous. Hers was one of few black families to move into the almost exclusively Mexican heritage neighborhood that comprised our school population. Her dark honey complexion was no different from her classmates, but
she was not one of them. In desperation after Tenaya's third complaint that Rico had called her "chocolate" I foolishly held his arm next to hers.

"What's different here, Rico? You're exactly the same color! " (I had earlier given him my speech, "name-calling that refers to a person's color is a particular kind of hatred called racism, and it's not allowed here.") Rico twisted around to look at my face.

"But Mrs. Israel, I'm Mexican and she's black."

Eight years old and they know about racism ---that it has only marginally to do with color, but rather with culture, and power. Tenaya's culture was not Rico's. Her culture was not shared by any other person in our class. She was alone, and she refused to be powerless.

I wondered how to go about engaging with this group of children in the process of making visible the politico-socio-cultural influences and structural inequality (Ogbu 1983, 1994) that determine where they live, where they come to school? I am not suggesting that these children, at the age of eight, would come to terms with issues of racism and poverty and discrimination. But I believe that if they don't developing a conscious awareness of cultural-minority status, the transparent filter of mainstream expectation, normed by the culture of power, will control who they might be. Empowerment comes from within.

I believe that the possibility of empowerment comes from the development of voice. By this I mean the knowledge that what one says will be heard and considered. Over the past few years, the vehicle for fostering this development of voice of my minority language/culture students has been Writer's Workshop. Writer's workshop, not writing
workshop, because who we are as people, the creator of the print, is the most important factor. To this end, my students and I have written, other years, everyday, for extended periods of time. Our writings were shared informally at the end of each writing session, privately with each other, and formally in Author's Teas with invited guests, parents and teachers. (Calkins, 1986, Graves 1983)

Research Questions

Initial evaluation of my students’ reading and writing revealed that their literacy skills were remarkably undeveloped, in contrast to the level of literacy achieved by my students of the previous year. That classroom had been characterized by an active and ongoing bilingual Writer’s Workshop in which students wrote on self-selected themes, participated in daily sharing of writing, and participated in various collaborative writing activities. This year, I was anxious to discover what effect a similar writing experience, (particularly peer collaborations) would have on these students. My original questions were:

1. How do children perceive of writing and themselves as writers?
2. How do children perceive the peer influences on their writing?
3. What do I, as teacher and participant in the classroom observe to be the impact of peer collaborations in the classroom?
4. How might literacy instruction, then, be organized to best take advantage of, and to incorporate, peer interactions into literacy instruction?

It is my goal to help my students find the tools with which to shape their own lives. I hope that this research project will further my understanding of the sociocultural nature
and influences on the acquisition and development of critical literacy, and the ability to use print to transform one's life (Freire 1987, Giroux, 1981, 1994).

Research Support for the Research Design

In formulating a data collection plan, and in anticipating the writing of my research, I borrowed from other research studies in the areas of elementary education and literacy development. The most significant studies have been, for me, those that combine ethnographic/descriptive data that provide a 'slice of life' picture of classroom experience. Studies in literacy and collaboration that influenced me specifically toward case study analysis include those by Nunn, (1984), Edelsky, (1986) Daiute, (1992), Dyson, (1989, 1993, 1994). However, certainly other descriptive studies of classroom communities and their interactions, specifically Newkirk (1994) and Peterson (1995) have been a powerful influence, as well as Heath's (1983) seminal research in Ways With Words. The inclusion of details about the students, of their school and community environment, allows me, as reader, to decide if the implications of the research are applicable to my instructional context, and me. Case study design thus appeared most appropriate to my goals of highlighting the process of the three target students, as they interacted as members of a writing community. I included data from other students as it served to further illustrate the processes and interactions of the case study subjects.

The data for this study was collected over the 1996-1997 school year, however my experiences over four years as a bilingual third grade teacher in the same elementary school provided me with opportunities to form relationships with parents which in turn informed me as to community expectations and goals for their children. These
relationships clearly influenced the way I perceived my students' work, and encouraged me to see beyond my own school-based goals to those of the community in which I taught. Therefore, the data spoke to me from within a framework of several years of experience and previous teacher/action research using case study design in my third grade classroom.

Data Collection

Challenges: Adjusting “The Plan” to Reality

It was my original intention to select three pairs of case study subjects for detailed observation and analysis. However, several characteristics of the elementary school site, of the students themselves, and of the nature of collaboration itself, made this approach impossible. Firstly, the typically transitional nature of attendance of students at this school made long-term data collection on any one student improbable. In fact, several of the students I had selected for observation moved to different schools within the first nine-week grading period. Secondly, social relationships among the students, most noticeably girls, often shaped their participation in collaborative endeavors: students frequently did not collaborate because ‘they were fighting’ although they resumed joint projects once the conflicts were resolved. Interestingly, the boys appeared to take a more pragmatic approach to writing collaborations: even feuding pairs would write together if the writing project itself was successful, regardless of personal conflicts outside Writer’s Workshop.

Thirdly, the configuration of collaborating groups changed frequently. As students changed topics, genres, and themes, the partners they chose to work with also changed. Therefore, I learned to focus on collaborations as they occurred, and although the same
students were most actively involved in collaborations, this meant that the case studies were actually snapshots of the joint writing activities of the three targeted students with a number of different partners, rather than a long term view of specific pairs.

Data Collection Strategies: Selection of Case Study Subjects

Data collection took place during Writer’s Workshop on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from August 29, 1996 through May 15, 1997. Writer’s Workshop typically ran for an hour each Wednesday and Thursday, and for an hour and a half each Friday. I collected three types of data: interview, document collection, and observation, in order to employ the method of triangulation, ‘the rationale for this strategy is that the flaws of one method are often the strengths of another, and by combining methods, observers can achieve the best of each, while overcoming their unique deficiencies’ (Merriam, 1988).

I collected seven different forms of data of the three types listed above, which I will describe here in order of their significance as effective methods for providing significant data: field notes, transcriptions of audiotapes of my recollections and reflections of the day’s writing interactions, student documents, informal interviews with individual students, and collaborating groups/pairs, formal interviews, surveys, and videotapes.

Fieldnotes

Initially, I continuously scripted student interactions during Writer’s Workshop, but as time passed, I became more selective in my written observations, and wrote field notes more specifically to capture student interactions that would reveal collaborative activities and intentions. I wrote fieldnotes of student interactions and responses in two specific areas: during the composing process, and again during daily sharing of their
written texts. These fieldnotes provided the greatest insight into both the student collaborative processes during composition and selection of their themes, as well as revealing their intentions for the written text.

**Taped Reflections and Anecdotal Record**

However, because I was the teacher in this classroom, I was occasionally forced to make a decision about whether to continue recording an interaction, or to accept student invitations to become involved in the interaction. In these instances I almost always chose to become a participant. In these instances I later created field notes in two distinct ways. I reconstructed the interaction according to my recollection at the end of the day in written form. I also recorded my recollections on tape and transcribed those later. The latter system provided the opportunity for me to create a more reflective researcher log, rather than a simple description of the remembered interactions.

**Student Writing Samples**

After fieldnotes, the next most important data came from the daily writing samples, (students' written texts) that I collected at the end of each sharing session. This data became particularly important for several reasons: this was the most consistent type of data I collected because students took responsibility for its collection. They dated and placed their texts in a folder in the writing center with astonishing reliability. Additionally, these documents allowed me to keep a chronological record of student development over time. In order to keep abreast of the sheer quantity of data, I made a weekly review of the written products that were collected at the end of each daily writing session.
Informal Interviews

Also useful were the informal interviews, or rather, informal questioning I was able to incorporate during the writing of my daily fieldnotes. This form of questioning allowed me to ask direct questions in informal contexts. Students were quite accustomed to my writing fieldnotes during Writer's Workshop. When I observed them doing something particularly interesting, or novel, I could easily conduct an 'informal interview' as part of my fieldnotes. The fact of my continued scribbling (and the fact that I, while nodding in encouragement and understanding, continued to look at my notebook, rather than at the child), seemed to relieve the pressure students felt in formal interviews, and their responses to my casually posed questions were longer, more complicated, and more reflective.

Formal Interviews

I conducted fifteen audiotaped formal interviews with several collaborating groups. These interviews proved less revealing than the informal questioning I was able to incorporate during the writing of my daily fieldnotes.

Videotape

I also collected one videotape of collaborative interactions during Writer's Workshop. I attempted through videotape to capture more fully student interactions, but the tape did not prove more revealing than fieldnotes. The process of videotaping did not turn out to be a viable means for ongoing data collection for two specific reasons. The first drawback --disruption of student process due to the unusual appearance of the
camera in the classroom— might have faded had the camera been used more frequently. Eventually the novelty would probably have worn off and the children would have returned to writing as usual. However, the awkwardness of the video camera was doubly compounded by the fact that I was taping, rather than writing or otherwise participating normally with my students.

In a nutshell, the data collecting strategies that allowed me to interact in a 'normal' fashion with my students provided the most significant data.

**Table of Data Collected**

As described in the previous section, I collected six major types of data: fieldnotes of student writing process, field notes of the daily author's share, informal interviews formal interview, student documents, (i.e. daily writing samples), and transcriptions of my audiotaped reflections of the events of the day. This represented a large set of data: almost five hundred pieces of data in all. The total number and breakdown of the six major types of data I collected are presented in Table One.

**Table One: Types and Quantity of Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Field Notes-Writing</th>
<th>Field Notes-Sharing</th>
<th>Documents</th>
<th>Informal Interview</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Daily Reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rico</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenaya</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marco</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Analysis**

Because the very nature of teacher research is to provide information that can be used to create the best possible learning environment, I was actively involved in some level of analysis during the course of data collection. Initially, I ordered the data chronologically
by student in order to evaluate growth in literacy development. I then examined the written products created by collaborating children over time; to evaluate the impact of possible shared knowledge and strategies. As the quantity of data grew, I began to organize it in several ways: by individual student, by collaborating groups/pairs, and whole class samples over time. However, these analyses did not overlap sufficiently to get a sense of the very vibrant processes I was observing. That is, I could not reconstruct the level of complexity I was observing through this re-examining of the data. When I began to analyze the daily fieldnotes of student process during writing time, the texts actually shared on that day, and my fieldnotes of student response to the text during sharing time, this strategy provided the greatest insight into the impact of both peer collaboration and peer response to the text on the subsequent writing events.

**Processes of Analysis**

Because I was steeped daily in the data, I became concerned that I would inadvertently 'push the river', that is, impose my own categories on the data, rather than allowing the categories to arise. Therefore I read and handled the data in many different ways. I transcribed my fieldnotes and anecdotal records on a regular basis. I read every piece of data many times. I spread all the documents out on the floor, the bed, and the computer desk-night table. I physically organized the data by date, by type of peer configuration, by literacy innovation. I cross-referenced the major types of data by child, date, by peer interaction, by type of collaboration, by development of literacy skill. Eventually the stacks of documents became unwieldy and I crated them in boxes of hanging files. As the possible categories expanded, I hung chart paper on the wall and
rearranged the data in various configurations by using post-it notes. Gradually I was able to discern general patterns of collaborative process, use of environmental print, copying of peer text, for example, and began to organize the data into those developing categories. While I continued to collect every piece of data I could, by the later months of the study I began to reach a saturation point of information from the data, where new categories were no longer suggested. At this point I began to presort the data into the established categories for analysis.

Unit of Analysis

For the purposes of this study I considered as the unit of analysis the literacy events for which I had collected multiple forms of data: observational data of both composing process and product performance, the actual student documents, and some form of interview data: either a formal audiotaped interview, or an informal 'interview' (that is, my fieldnotes of student responses to my specific questions regarding their process) during the time of writing.

Selection of Case Study Subjects

I selected my case study subjects on the basis of several criteria, at risk academically, achieving substantially below grade level in literacy, and members of minority language/culture groups. The three children I selected all read and wrote very substantially below third-grade level. Both Tenaya and Rico were assessed at a pre-Primer level, Marco at approximately mid first grade. All three had been considered at some point as candidates for Special services, and Tenaya had been coded as learning disabled and was currently receiving pullout instruction by the LD Specialist. Marco and
Rico were both non-Spanish speaking boys of Mexican heritage, and Tenaya was Black. Of all the children in the classroom, my colleagues also considered these three as most at-risk for failure. Additionally, a brief review of their writing partners during the first weeks of school indicated that they were good candidates for this particular study of collaboration. Table Two presents the peers with whom the case study children collaborated during the first weeks of school.

Table Two: Peer Collaborations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study Subject</th>
<th>Collaborating Peers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marco</td>
<td>Chico MJ Sergio Mario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenaya</td>
<td>Raquel Khrystle June Esther</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rico</td>
<td>Chico MJ Ralph Mario</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By the end of the year I had data on each child to support thirty 'units of analysis' as described above, i.e., literacy events for which I had triangulated data: student documents, fieldnotes, and informal interview, as well as fieldnotes of the sharing of the written piece with the class audience. In addition I also had at least an additional twenty written products of each child noted above.

Unanticipated Circumstances

In retrospect, a drawback of the study was that, although we became a dual-language classroom due to administrative restructuring to accommodate class size, all but five students had received all previous instruction in English. Thus, although both English and Spanish were used orally, and in spite of my encouragement and modeling, very few children wrote in Spanish at all. Interestingly, those that did use both languages
demonstrated comparatively well developed literacy and did not meet my research
criterion of 'at risk'. None of the case study children chose to write in Spanish, and both
Marco and Rico were early victims of language shift. However, the oral use of Spanish
clearly mediated the development of writing in English, and both languages were actively
used in conversation about and around writing.
CHAPTER FOUR: FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE CASES

Introduction

It is my hope that this study will serve to contribute to the body of research on critical/radical/empowering pedagogies. I am concerned with the notion of developing student voice, and how instruction can be seated so that my students’ narratives, ways with words and their very lives will assume central stage in the classroom, creating the opportunity for dialog between my students’ texts and the texts of the school. Thus, my study is situated somewhere between a progressive stance that emphasizes growth through self reflection, organically driven texts, and above all individual voice (Freire and Macedo 1987; Freire 1994), and a post-progressive stance that challenges me to provide explicit instruction in the privileged discourses of the dominant ideology (Delpit 1988, Gee 1995, 1996). My empirical teaching and research experiences have personified the cautionary message that instruction in these privileged discourses may derail a child’s implicit knowledge of voice, effectively silencing her (O’Neil 1977, Edelsky 1986, 1996, Fox 1993, Hoyles 1977). I believe I have found in Writer’s Workshop a way to balance acquisition of self-driven literacy with the literacy forms of the dominant ideology in a way that allows for a permeable interaction of voice and authority.

Areas of Discussion

In the following section I will briefly address my research against the backdrop of other researchers in several critical areas. I will differentiate between writing workshop versus a Writer’s Workshop, the role of writing as a tool for empowerment, the emphasis on student as creator rather than consumer through the shift from the teaching of writing to the teaching of writers. I will address how redefining the context of Writer’s Workshop creates the possibility of liberatory literacy experiences, and how student processes of collaboration thus supported create uniquely effective zones of proximal development.
Finally, I will address differences in teacher-created versus student-created zones of proximal development, how the patterns of student-created zones provide for increased learning, and what we as teachers can learn from them. These topics are meant to provide a framework for considering the case studies, and will be further addressed in the Discussion of the Cases.

**Entering the Literacy Club through the Writing Door**

Fostering critical literacy has become the most important goal I have for my bilingual third graders. By critical literacy, I mean the ability to use print for intrinsic personal purposes, to use literacy as a tool for extending critical thought and action, and to have a sense of increased personal efficacy through the ability to use print in a variety of cultural contexts. In my struggle to discover how to do this enormous work, I have experienced two distinct and significant shifts in literacy instruction of my third grade students.

In the first shift, I have come away from a reading-writing emphasis to a writing-reading emphasis. Rather than applying what we learn from reading the work of published authors to our understanding of writing, my students and I focus on the reverse. In this I differ from the perspective that we learn to write through our experiences of reading proposed by Frank Smith (1982, 1985, 1990). Smith claims that the actual time we spend writing is far too limited for us to garner all we know about writing from the experience of writing itself. I agree that the time typically spent writing in schools is far too little for anyone to become a writer, and perhaps the proof is that, indeed, very few of us actually become good writers. It seems possible that for those children whose lived experiences are
reflected in the literature they read, reading does provide a scaffold to the notion of authorship. However, for my minority language/culture group students, children's literature that does not speak to their lived experiences only serves to mark the difference between their lives and the lives depicted in books, and they may conclude that literacy is not for them. The very paucity of published works by minority authors bears witness to the failure of schools to foster the literacy development of non-mainstream students.

Frank Smith (1990) contends that stories are second nature to human reconstructions of the world:

> Stories are our way of perceiving, of conceiving, or creating ...Our stories are the vantagepoints from which we perceive the world and the people in it. (p 64-65)

If, as Frank Smith asserts, stories are the very essence of human creativity, why then are our bookshelves so empty of books speaking of and to minority experience? The very absence of these texts demonstrates that we are failing miserably to open the door to the literacy club for minority voices. My answer to addressing these silenced voices begins in a reorientation to a writing-reading emphasis. This shift is significant for a variety of reasons. First, my students frequently have a fractured literacy background in which some of their literacy instruction has occurred in English, and some in Spanish. They often have little internalized sense of letter-sound relationships, a scenario that typically results in referrals for remedial reading instruction. However, it is my observation that writing provides the most effective way for my students to acquire the skills for using print language. The knowledge they acquire about letter-sound relationships grows as they are engaged in the creation of texts
that arise from their own organic contexts. By organic contexts, I mean the lived experiences that frame my students' interests, their social interactions, the interactions with talk and text that support the development of personal purposes for print. In this way, writing is from the very first an exercise in creating meaning. When children are engaged in writing their own texts, often in collaboration with their peers, they rapidly develop sufficient skill to create readable texts. Ken Goodman (1986) observed that when children wrote, they were constantly reading and rereading their texts in progress, and the knowledge they gained about print language transferred dramatically into the reading of their own and others' texts. Clearly, writing has a powerful influence on the development of emergent reading.

Second, my students come from marginalized populations whose voices are infrequently heard outside their own neighborhoods, and whose experiences are rarely found between the covers of 'good children's literature'. Through the sharing of their own texts their voices and the voice of their community enters into the school. The sharing of the children's stories at a quarterly Author's Tea provides an opportunity for their parents to participate in the celebration of these cultural texts. Over the years, parents have occasionally chosen to contribute to the anthologies, and their written texts also contribute to the legitimizing of minority voice within the school.

Third, as third graders, my students may still believe in the myth of meritocracy, the notion that equal opportunity exists for all, and that what they can accomplish will depend on their individual efforts. Yet, I fear that if my students do not develop a
conscious awareness of the structural inequality and institutionalized racism that disempowers people of color, the poor, the marginalized, these unspoken barriers will control their “possible lives” (Rose 1995) and determine not who they are and might be, but who they get to be. How can I enter into this arena with them? As a white, middle class woman, discussing these issues with my students of color may only serve to further the racist text, regardless of my intentions toward its demystification. How can I help them gain armor against oppression without presenting my own teacher imposed agenda? How can I address issues with such devastating social implications in a manner appropriate to eight-year old children? I have found the answer to these questions in my students’ collective narratives. As my students write for increasingly self-directed purposes their texts begin to reflect more deeply the social fabric of lives. By binding these collected stories into an anthology we create a deeply situationally contextualized social history of collected narratives. When these anthologies are reproduced to create a classroom set of volumes, we have an organic text that can be read and reread critically. The complex intertext that emerges through our discussions of their own stories provides my students and me with ample opportunities to connect to deeper social issues. The critical analysis they bring to their own stories provides a scaffold to the critical examination of other writings. Thus, through the writing and sharing of their own texts, my students create a body of literature that becomes a conduit to other published texts.

From a Writing Workshop to a Writer’s Workshop

In the second shift, I have come away from ‘teaching writing’ in a
Writing Workshop, to ‘teaching writers’, in a Writer’s Workshop. This does not mean that I never ‘teach writing’. For students who have already developed both the skills necessary for transcribing text as well as a sense of personal purpose for literacy it may prove useful. Teaching writing can be an important instructional practice in which students are guided to develop specific literacy skills, including, for example, at the third grade level, standardized spelling, punctuation, use of literary devices such as simile and metaphor, and aspects of plot formation. However, I do not believe that ‘teaching writing’ will help my students develop critical literacy, and it is obvious that ‘teaching writing’ runs the dangerous risk of fracturing an emergent writer’s sense of purpose. A child just beginning to formulate a personal purpose for writing can be irreparably damaged by instruction that focuses on standardization of print, organization of text, or appropriateness of topic. Therefore, in our Writer’s Workshop I do not ‘teach writing’. Writer’s Workshop remains exclusively the domain in which my students experiment with and discover their own purposes for writing. The importance of allowing students to write according to their own purpose and experience is underscored by Ferdman (1990) who noted that instruction in ‘schooled literacy’ can create divisions of ‘us’ and ‘them’ that further serve to marginalize and silence minority language/culture group children:

Which texts and which writing tasks does the child engage in as ‘ours’ and which as ‘theirs’? When a child perceives a writing task and its symbolic content as belonging to and reaffirming his or her cultural identity, it is more likely that he or she will become engaged and individual meaning will be transmitted or derived. (p.
Writing to express and investigate personal meaning transcends traditional schooled notions of what constitutes good writing, and what styles, languages and stories are deemed worthy of being told. The exploration of self and larger identity as a member of a writing community creates the potential for the mainstream ideology to lose some of its power to dominate, and for other cultural identities to find a voice.

The more I learn about developing critical literacy with my young students, the more concerned I am that the processes most necessary for its development are the antithesis of current methodologies in elementary schools. As primary educators we are encouraged to give students opportunities to be active in their own learning, to provide experiential lessons in which children manipulate realia and interact in authentic situations (Harste, Short and Burke 1996). In all of this preparation, the notion of student purpose for the task is lost. We are pressured to provide motivating instruction, in which motivation is equated with student interest. We as teachers are engaged in the ‘why’s’ of instruction and curriculum planning, but we do not concern ourselves with the bigger question of intrinsic student purpose for the task. Yet, critical literacy is by definition overwhelmingly concerned with the notion of personal purpose. As I define it for my teaching context, critical literacy is the ability to use print for one’s own intentions. Therefore, my students need to be given the opportunity to write texts exclusively for their own purposes, rather than according to teacher direction.
Writing as Empowerment: Students as Creators Rather than Consumers

I am perennially excited about what my students are doing as writers. Over the last several years I have told anyone who would listen, about the ways my students express vitality in print—the tongue in cheek poem Richard wrote about a white piece of paper, too poor to buy a drawing (after I insisted in a moment of autocratic failing that they create texts without illustrations), the narrative Adriana wrote about being unjustly blamed for her cousin’s accident on top of being forced against her wishes to share her roller-blades, Matt’s admiring biographical piece about a friend “who has manners and very good ones, too”.

Enthusiasm is contagious, it seems, and my colleagues often invite me into their primary classrooms to help them set up a Writer’s Workshop. As I look around their bright and inviting rooms I find myself reluctant to tell them what I have learned over the past few years about the absolute necessity of letting go and letting students take ownership of their own process. I know that the varied opportunities available in my colleagues’ classrooms demand a high level of teacher-organized and teacher-directed activity. I even recognize many of the learning center activities so carefully crafted for maximum success-- in which students will follow color coded instructions and after several trials generate one of the many possible teacher-researched outcomes. Active, interesting, fun, even. But the intended possibilities are always known. Rather than providing opportunities for shared exploration in an open-ended zone of proximal development, this teaching, however interactive and colorful, simply represents another approach to the one-way transmission of information from teacher to student. The
children engaged in these activities are still consumers, rather than creators. And creativity, by which I mean being engaged in creating, is difficult to organize neatly. I have not been very successful in providing opportunities for autonomous discovery in other areas of teaching and learning. I'm not sure how to turn over the process in Science or Math, or Social Studies. But in writing, where the content is controlled only by individual intention, and the process only by the limits of imagination, I have learned how to turn it over. Sometimes the creation of texts requires movement, rocking in a chair, pacing, or perhaps lying flat on the floor with a clipboard. Sometimes my students need to reach a saturation point of peer discussion before they can begin to write. Sometimes they need to create lists of words on the page, reaching a threshold level of text before they can expand their meaning, rethink their purpose, or revise. In contrast to the neatly ordered learning centers described above, Writer's Workshop is a madhouse. In Writer's Workshop my students experience almost total autonomy of both process and product. Like many creative endeavors, it is often messy and lacking obvious external order. That "order" is germinating within the groups of children noisily collaborating in the process of being and becoming writers. They are engaged in all kinds of behaviors typically discouraged in classrooms, as they argue, copy, plagiarize each other's material, brag, threaten and manipulate in print. Their texts frequently consist of only a few lines. Their longer texts rarely follow the story grammars found in children's literature, instead they create long repetitive poems, and unedited narratives Graves (1983) labeled bed-to-bed stories in which nothing happens, no denouement is reached, no characters are changed forever by the circumstances of the story told. All of these actions and interactions delight
me, because they indicate that my students are no longer concerned about what I might think matters. They are no longer controlled by external constraints or decontextualized rules of good writing. They are busy finding a voice.

**From the Teaching of Writing to the Teaching of Writers**

I cannot overstate this: I am not interested in teaching writing to my students newly acquiring literacy. I want to them first and foremost to become writers. This is a significant distinction that derives from a profoundly different orientation of teaching, and that provokes a distinctly different set of classroom circumstances. It is possible to ‘teach writing’ without deviating from the transmission mode. One can ‘teach writing’ by presenting children with examples of ‘good writing’ according to a narrow mainstream definition, and providing them with opportunities to practice the various school-approved genres. One can ‘teach writing’ by creating a reading-writing connection where children rewrite story endings, experiment with standard story grammars, receive instruction in the elements of a ‘good story’, and synthesize these understandings into their own texts. At the nadir, one can ‘teach writing’ by providing drill in what Jenny Gumperz (1986) calls ‘a system of decontextualized knowledge validated by test scores.’ But, what I want is to teach children to be writers. I do not wish to promote ‘schooled literacy’, described by Wayne O’Neil (1977) as ‘the teaching of reading [and writing] as a decontextualized activity devoid of personal purpose and having no relationship to the language and knowledge already possessed by the child’. The notion of personal purpose is central to
the idea of education as empowering.

In *Border Crossings* (1992), Henry Giroux speaks to link between empowerment and critical thinking:

Q: We hear a lot about empowerment these days. How do you understand that term?
Giroux: It is the ability to think and act critically. (p. 11)

In order to think and act critically, we need to have a purpose, and intent for our actions. In other words, empowerment comes from examining the 'why's' of our options and actions. I think that understanding and developing purpose, the *why* of writing, is the most significant aspect of becoming a writer. Hoyles (1977) challenged educators to become conscious of our goals for literacy. He warned that the overemphasis in schools on social control was easily generalized to schooled literacy tasks. The context of writing, not the writing task is what needs to be revolutionized. Perhaps the key lies in freedom of process, rather than freedom of product.

**Revolutionizing the Context: Liberatory Literacy**

I believe that the contexts in which emancipatory educational practices occur are imbedded in the particularity of the specific learning environment, in all of its aspects, including place/time, purpose and people. Therefore, the specific characteristics of the learning experience probably cannot be easily or successfully generalized. That is, practices which result in liberating literacy experiences in one context can not be counted on to produce similar results in another. Graves (1983) revolutionary work in process writing serves as an excellent case in point. The elements of writing process that he observed to create empowering writing experiences were specific to the characteristics
and cultural capital of that particular group of students: white, middle class, middle-school aged, literate. Yet, those elements have become, in the hands of educators, an inflexible orthodoxy frequently employed without regard to the specifics of the learners (Fox 1993, Newkirk 1994). Gallimore and Tharp (1990) concluded that one of process writing's most universally adopted elements, the "writing conference" was effective in Graves' studies because it piggy-backed on the kinds of instructional dialogs that typify parent-child interactions in white, middle class homes. Thus, its application with other, different children failed to create a similarly effective learning experience. It seems likely, however, that Graves' approach had less to do with a careful analysis of student process, and represented rather the top-down imposition of an adult model of writing (Thomas Newkirk, personal communication, November 6, 1998). In that case, the approach failed to represent a student-based taxonomy of writing behaviors, and its success speaks therefore more strongly to the students' ability to 'learn the writing rules' than to culturally embedded characteristics of the process. However, the hook, line and sinker adoption of Graves' approach by so many teachers of writing makes me somewhat reluctant to present a hypothetical scenario for developing critical literacy, because its application outside of my specific context will likely render it meaningless. Nevertheless, my studies have taught me that it is possible to create writing environments that serve to give my students a voice, and equally possible to create writing environments that silence them. I have been guided by the writings of other researchers who seek to understand emancipatory literacy practices and whose findings have informed my own investigations. I have been primarily interested in children writing, but I have been influenced by other
studies in different school settings that examine students’ interactive processes, most notably *Writing in a Crowded Place* (Peterson 1995), and *Listening In: Children Talk about Books and Other Things* (Newkirk 1992). Ann Dyson (1994) suggests that a reorientation from ‘the child’ to ‘the children’ provides a useful vantage point for considering curriculum; one that requires that we focus on the sociocultural situatedness of the literacy event, and that (to rephrase her) ‘we frame children not with the relations that matter to us, but with the relations that matter to them’ (p 7). Vygotsky (1978 p 105) expressed concern decades ago that writing instruction was based on ‘artificial training’ and decontextualized process handed from teacher to child and devoid of personal intention. Ken and Yetta Goodman (1990) have long maintained that ‘language, written language included, is learned most easily in the context of use’ (p 225) advocating for authentic opportunities for language use. However, Thomas Newkirk (1986) cautioned that ‘assigned versus unassigned pieces does not exactly differentiate between authentic and inauthentic’ (p 173), and Mem Fox (1993) urged that the notion of authenticity be carefully examined, insisting that ‘let’s pretend isn’t real’ (p 4). What are children’s goals and practices that can be appropriated in such a way to revolutionize the context of writing? What are their intrinsic purposes for creating print? What does, then, constitute authenticity of purpose for children?

Dyson’s (1989, 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1995) research concludes that a dominant goal for children writers is to establish social cohesion, and that writing is at once an admired knowledge and skill, as well as social tool. This has been borne out overwhelmingly in my own work, as children created texts for a multitude of social
purposes, to exclude or include, amaze or dismay, and almost always for public display.

From this framework, then, how does one revolutionize the context of writing instruction? Here are the characteristics supported by research:

Writer’s Workshop needs to be a place where students meet for an extended period every day for the purpose of engaging with print. It needs to be a place where children can experience maximum autonomy over both process and product. Choices of seating, writing materials, writing partnerships, must be in their hands. It needs to be a place where talk and text can be allowed to mediate each other. Harste, Burke and Woodward (1982) noted that the difficulties children faced in acquiring print literacy stemmed in part from the contrast between situationally controlled experiences outside of school, and the contextually controlled nature of print. Therefore, it is important that conversation be recognized as a valuable and viable part of the composing process. It is also important that the teacher be equally involved as a member of the writing community.

In order for me to be an effective mentor, I must also be a member of the literacy club to which my students belong. Membership comes from jointly participating as a writer with my students. Only when I am also engaged in writing do I remember how difficult it often is. When I am also a writer I recognize that sometimes the words and inspiration don’t come, and that my product for that day will be an empty page. Kinneavey’s (1994) observation buoys my ability to view writing as part of a larger often intangible creative process, helping me to remain cognizant that ‘much thinking time is part of writing’, and to resist the ‘implication that anytime a pencil hits the paper, [then, and only then] it’s writing’. Writer’s Workshop must also be a place where children can share their writing
daily, where they can experience their words being heard by an audience gathered for that purpose. This is important because most of my students wrote performance pieces—that is, stories for audience effect. The act of sharing their text with others provided simultaneously a motivation for writing as well as a forum for reconsidering their words.

**Collaboration**

‘Writing in Social Time’

Ann Dyson (1989) characterized the children of her case studies as ‘writing in social time’. I am struck by the aptness of this to describe the writing processes of my own students. Their interactions with peers illustrate so clearly Vygotsky’s notion that children develop first as social beings, their own developing cognition mediated through their interaction with others. As they wrote, their motivation as writers was supported in large part by the reactions of their peers, whose acceptance or rejection of their texts provided a dynamic backdrop for continued effort. In fact, it often appeared that their written texts required the verbal response of their peers, as if, as Bakhtin suggests, ‘the word in language is half someone else’s... the job as listener is not to passively listen, but to prompt response’. In Writer’s Workshop, my students talked, talked, talked. They talked about what they’d written, or planned to write, they responded each other’s texts, and sometimes what they talked about had nothing specifically to do with their writing at all. It was clear that talk and text were inextricably intertwined. Dyson (1989) observed that children created textual worlds through social interaction, and social worlds through interacting with their texts. That is, they collaborated on written texts in order to form
relationships, and formed relationships in order to collaborate on written texts. The stamina and enthusiasm my students demonstrated for writing was clearly fueled by its capacity to function as a social tool. Bozuvich' (1967) claim that 'the attitude of a school child toward his studies depends primarily on the extent to which his studies have become a means for fulfilling his need for a new social status', also helps to illuminate why writing became such a powerful and self-perpetuating activity for my students. The very act of writing brought their goals into existence.

Collaborating to Produce Texts: From Talk to Text

In Single Texts/Plural Authors, Ede and Lunsford (1990) attempted to redefine collaboration, identifying instances of writing in which co-authors shared or delegated amongst themselves the tasks of planning, writing, and revising. Consideration of my students' writing behaviors in terms of this list challenged me to broaden my definition of collaboration, and to begin to view a broader range of written as well as oral interactions as pertaining directly to collaborative writing. My students routinely participated in the varied types of collaborations described by Ede and Lunsford, such as one writer dictating and the other transcribing, one writer overseeing and organizing the text pages and illustrations to be completed by others, one writer creating the original text and the other revising it. These elaborate collaborations required a great deal of verbal negotiation, and the reflective nature of their conversations contributed to their meta-cognitive development as users of language. They talked about what texts they might write in English rather than Spanish, often reflecting on the needs of their intended audience, and
then wrote accordingly. They made explicit comments about variations in discourse style, commenting on the effect of the language on the feeling of the text, and then appropriated their peers’ language in their own narratives. They queried and challenged each other’s choice of words in incipient awareness of dialect difference, an awareness that eventually carried over into print. Through talk, students became conscious that their culturally influenced ways with words could be deliberately manipulated for literary effect—to create voice.

The interaction of talk and text had a multilayered effect on writing. Students developed an awareness of the ways in which written text differs from oral text. They struggled with re-creating prosodic details in the written texts, and were often frustrated with the task. However, they also chose to create texts whose very meaning could only be derived from the reader’s ability to add prosodic detail in the oral performance. (experiencing for themselves Plato’s complaint against the weakness of print over oral argument, Gee 1995, 1996). Thus they claimed ownership of their texts both by celebrating or ignoring the constraints of context.

Collaborating to Produce Texts: From Text to Text

My students collaborated as writers in many different ways that allowed them to create a written text. Less fluent writers appropriated each other’s strategies for transcribing language, such as relying solely on environmental classroom print to create stilted texts that nonetheless met their goals for lengthiness. They relied on other students and me for spellings. They copied verbatim their classmates’ texts in order to participate as co-authors in the daily sharing circle. More fluent writers appropriated their peers’
more literary accomplishments, such as writing style, format, or story grammar.

However, the roles of skilled versus less-skilled writers remained relatively fluid, as children defined their writing ability according to a rather different rubric. The collaborating groups often consisted of children bringing varied levels of expertise to the task, (Dalton 1993; Daiute and Dalton 1993). Thus a child who found transcription difficult but was admired for his great ideas might write with a partner who was a great speller but less creative. These spontaneous patterns of collaboration created opportunities for students who might not otherwise have had the chance, to write successfully, and be considered and consider themselves authors. Gee (1994) commented that classrooms need to be places where thick and layered interactions can occur. He remarked specifically on the importance of a collaborative environment where children could progress from social activity to individual activity. Writer’s Workshop embodies those characteristics, and the effect on student growth as critical thinkers and writers never ceases to amaze me.

Shared Zones of Proximal Development: Content ZPD’s

Several years ago a group of my students had independently decided to poll and graph their classmates’ favorite songs. I was proud of their appropriation of this literacy device for their own purposes and displayed it prominently in the hallway next to the door. The next day my colleague and good friend commented that she wasn’t sure that was such a good idea, gesturing toward the song titles which had been rapidly written without much concern for standardized spelling. I acknowledged that the students had not had publishing in mind when they made the graph, but that I wanted them to enjoy the public
validation of their efforts. The next day Debra took me aside and again pointed to the graph. "Archer", she said, "just what do you think those song titles are?" I accurately (and defensiv e) decoded the creative spellings for several popular songs, ending lamely with, "I don't know what this is, a Buddy Holly remix, I think".

"No", Debra said, tracing an index finger under the letters that spelled out Boody Holis, "the name of this group is 'The Booty Holes'."

Recalling the incident makes me laugh, but it is a good example of the pitfalls of not sharing my students ZPD's. One of the great advantages of a daily sharing session of written works, is that when my students share an aspect of their lives, they can count on their peers to understand the context of their narratives. I am frequently drawn into discussions with my students about their writing in which I do not share their knowledge base. In these instances it is often dialog with their peers that mediates their writing process, as well as my knowledge acquisition, and allows me to participate as learner in their collaborations (Gallimore and Tharp 1990). Writer's Workshop will fail to be an arena of emancipatory transformation if the flow of information and awareness only moves one way, if the acquisition of multiple 'ways with words' (Heath 1983) is only for my students. There has to be a two-way sharing of our lives and narratives in order for the imagination of possible worlds to flourish and for us to share in an 'increasing sum' (Takaki 1987) of collective understanding. Maxine Greene (1995) writes it so well:

'Indeed it takes imagination to bring people together in these times, in speech and action, to provoke them to try and understand each other's perspectives, to tap into each other's desires, even others dreams...to imagine...is to look at things as if they truly could be otherwise' (p. 55).
Student-Created Versus Teacher-Created ZPD's

Previous research addressing zones of proximal development has focused on the ways students' knowledge and the knowledge of their community can become a bridge between what they know, and what schools want them to know (Moll, 1994, Moll and Greenberg, 1990). The cultural capital of the students and their community has thus been made explicit, to be honored as an information source of equal complexity and value to the information dispensed by schools. The 'ways with words' of the community have also been effectively used in literacy programs to create instructional dialogs that parallel the discourses of the children's homes (Gallimore and Tharp, 1990). In these studies, the children’s knowledge was appropriated by teachers in order to assist their acquisition of school-approved forms of knowledge and display. That is, the zones of proximal development, rooted in student knowledge and practice, were nonetheless created by teachers to advance student learning. In other research, Daiute and Dalton (1993) investigated the ways in which children’s zones of proximal development facilitated the acquisition of the writing skills, revealing the flexible nature of the roles of expert and novice. Nevertheless, in this study, the student created ZPD’s merely served to facilitate the acquisition of teacher-based goals of standardized spelling and punctuation, again emphasizing school-approved forms of knowledge and display.

However, in my study of writing it became clear to me that the kinds of zones children created with each other according to their own goals and intentions differed substantially from the kinds of zones I had created with children (Newkirk, 1992, Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). The effect of the student-created zones was that children became not
only proficient writers according to the school-based criteria of standardization, but also developed strong voices. These zones differed from my teacher zones in a variety of ways. Children were ultimately concerned with the story, but they focussed on sharing ways for creating text, with an overriding emphasis on the process of creation rather than the product. Indeed, their stories sometimes appeared almost a byproduct of their other more pressing concerns of creating social networks—which in turn served as a vehicle for the sharing of their creative processes. To my observing eye, these complicated interactions formed a recursive moibius strip that could not be analyzed into a progression of discrete acts without losing its essential character.

Children’s ZPD’s were also characterized by a level of potential conflict that rarely characterizes teacher-student interactions. That is, when students appeal to a teacher for help, they can expect a supportive response. However, when children appealed to their peers for help, the peers’ response depended on their opinion of the validity of the request. Repeated requests for spelling were often rebuffed with “hey, I just told you how to spell that, look, it’s up there, in your writing.” This created a zone of proximal development in which children became more strategic in their attempts to problem-solve, and also learned to rely on large network of peer-support.

Summary

The areas of discussion touched on here are intended to form a framework for understanding the following case studies. The case studies are presented as narratives of an individual child’s life as a developing writer over the course of a school year. Yet, they are much more than just stories. Situated both empirically and theoretically, they serve a
vehicle for re-examining literacy instruction and practices in elementary classrooms. It is my hope, that by making explicit the philosophical political agenda that frames me as a teacher-researcher, other educators will be similarly encouraged to evaluate and situate their own practice.
CHAPTER FIVE: PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

Introduction to the Cases

The three case study children presented here were students in my third grade dual language classroom in 1996-1997 (see Chapter Three). Palo Verde School resembled a walled mission with its fresh coat of thick white paint, encircled by a teal colored six-foot metal fence. It was a newly renovated building housing over three hundred students on the economically impoverished south side of a large Southwestern city. All but a handful of children enrolled at Palo Verde walked to school from their neighborhoods to the west and south. The school had been classified as a Chapter-One school, with at least ninety-five percent of the children living below the poverty line.

Marco and Rico lived close to each other in small apartment complexes far to the west, and both rode the bus the school. Tenaya lived in the closest neighborhood, in one of the ancient mobile homes clustered into dusty trailer parks.

Each of these children participated in the Writer's Workshop, and each of them was an actor in their own transformation, and in the transformation of their peers, and me.
Case Study One

Introducing Rico

Rico began the year as a struggling writer. He had only a handful of sight words, and a few letter/sound correspondences under his belt, and he felt deeply the discrepancy between his writing skills and those of his peers. He wanted desperately to collaborate with his peers, but feared their rejection, and the lack of teacher direction during Writer’s Workshop left him at sea.

As the year progressed he began to write with his peers, going through several distinct stages. His first collaborations were largely social interactions that resulted in little text, but suggested the possibility that writing could be fun. When his peers desire to make him write like them resulted in their over-correction of his texts, he completely withdrew from them. However, rather than retreating into non productive silence, he wrote and rewrote his texts until his sense of authorship was less easily shaken by the ‘voice of authority’. In this, he continued to differ from his peers, who tended to overemphasize spelling and punctuation, valuing instead the story he intended to tell. Gradually he found a balance between peer assistance and autonomy.

As he became more fluent (that is, as he gained enough mastery over the sound system to write freely, able to focus on his purpose rather than the manner of transcription), he developed multiple purposes for writing, including peer rebuttal, revising ‘reality’, and to entertain. His peers were outspoken in their admiration of his developing voice, and this success simultaneously elevated his status in both his own as well as his peers’ eyes. Rico also participated in a collaboratively written play, in which many
children created character sketches for a group performance.

District required assessments and teacher imposed restrictions during Writer’s Workshop temporarily derailed Rico’s progress as a writer, but supported by interactions with peers, he was able to reject the imposed paradigm and return to his own successful strategies.

As the year pulled to a close, Rico wrote with increasing confidence both by himself and with his classmates. His stamina and fluency increased markedly, that is he was able to compose easily readable texts of substantial length and his narratives revealed his growing awareness of the possibilities for print. However, in spite of tremendous gains in all areas, purpose, fluency, voice, Rico’s writing did not yet incorporate the expected grade-level achievement in spelling and punctuation.

Rico

“Do YOU speak Spanish, teacher? What days are YOUR days?”

Rico’s forehead furrowed with concern. His expectations for third grade were clearly far from being met. What he expected was ONE third grade teacher, and an English speaking classroom. What he got was two teachers sharing a position, and a dual language classroom. Most of the students, including Rico, had adjusted to the job-share fairly well. My colleague and I chose each other for the split position because we shared similar philosophies and our classroom practices were very compatible. However, I had been a bilingual teacher for the last few years, and so when the need for bilingual classroom placements outnumbered the available slots, six Spanish-dominant children were moved into our classroom and dual-language instruction began.
Perhaps complicated by these factors, for Rico and his classmates the first few weeks of this school year were marked by an unusually difficult transition from summer to school. In spite of soaring temperatures my students clamored to go outside for recess. Once outside they galloped after soccer balls, jumped rope, and played kickball in reckless defiance of the one hundred plus degree heat. When we came in from recess and the boys had doused their heads in the water fountain and everyone had had a drink, they threw themselves down to cool off on the carpeted floor. I fretted at the "loss of instructional time," and worried at the lack of classroom order, yet, each of these early Fall days with them I joined them on the carpet, to their obvious delight. A teacher on the floor becomes perhaps simply another person, and in this way we became acquainted.

When they learned I was a vegetarian, Rico elaborately modeled catching and live-releasing the occasional insect that flew into our room. He twined his arm through mine to draw my attention to the green worms that hung on strands from the grapevine overhanging the chain-link fence that enclosed the schoolyard. Faced with the threat of discontinuity in the classroom, Rico more than met me halfway in his quest to "be friends."
Section One

Overview Of Section One

Rico’s literacy instruction in previous years had emphasized the mastery of writing skills, focusing on the acquisition of letters and regularized sound relationships, certain ‘high frequency words, the ability to follow simple print directions necessary for completing worksheets, and rare opportunities for self-selected composing within a provided format: a page of a pop-up book, a card inviting a parent to a school function. The simultaneous instruction in both creative spellings as well as the Dolch word list had created a profound confusion for Rico, as he attempted to incorporate a letter/sound system with sight words that violated every letter-sound relationship he had been taught. His response to these conflicting possibilities was to reject completely the ‘given words’ and use his own highly idiosyncratic method of transcription. The fill-in-the-blanks worksheets had provided enough of a meaning scaffold for him to reread these texts. Without that framework, both writing and reading on his own were extremely limited. He simply could not recreate the meaning of his intended message. Additionally, the teacher directed nature of both process and product left Rico with little opportunity to develop any meaningful reason to write. Writing was not something that he needed.
Lack of Student Purpose as a Barrier to Writing

Reluctant Writer: The Downside of Teacher Directed Writing Activities

Rico was not particularly interested in writing, which he described as hard and boring. However, he was fascinated by his classmates’ interactions during Writer’s Workshop, as they cemented friendships and created new alliances through their collaborations. He watched curiously as the various collaborating groups discussed who would sit with whom, and where, as they collected paper and pencils and other writing paraphernalia. Unfortunately, both his literacy skills and his social skills were equally underdeveloped and it was difficult for him to gain entry into these peer groups. If his request to join a group were rebuffed, he responded to the refusal by taunting, which only served to further his outsider status.

Writing to “Get it Done”

Rico’s earliest writing, in response to the prompt to describe a classmate, demonstrated little familiarity and comfort with print, and, combined with the heavy penciling and multiple erasures, revealed Rico’s lack of confidence as a writer. Writing did appear to be both hard and boring. After many minutes of staring at the ceiling tiles he asked me how to spell three ring binder, and then quickly completed the assignment.

Witt surt blu sorrs. Brawn sus blak her
she his a 3 ring binder wit soks sort her werson hrs

(white shirt blue shorts brown shoes black hair
she has a 3-ring binder white socks short hair (undecipherable)

While his classmates reveled in the autonomy of process and product
they experienced in Writer's Workshop, Rico was at a loss as how to proceed
during writing time. The freedom to make his own choices of content and
form left him wondering WHY. Without a teacher-prompt, Rico could find no
intrinsic purpose for composing. For several weeks he merely sat by the
sidelines of other composing groups and traced cartoons of Garfield. At the
end of August he wrote the following sentence under one of these drawings:

Ouns a qun a time thaera was a cat namD grflaD
(Once upon a time there was a cat named Garfield)

Section Two

Overview of Section Two

While Rico's Garfield caption was unremarkable both in form and
content, it was his first independently created text. Content, length, writing
methodology and format were all self-selected. In that it represented a
breakthrough in his perceptions of what writing might be and how to go about
it. Peer response to his shared text now provided part of an answer to the why
of writing. Rico rapidly moved past the safety of captions to develop a
narrative story line, which he elaborated over several writing sessions. Writing
with and to his peers expanded his sense of the possibilities for print; writing
assumed personal purpose.

As Rico began to interact with his classmates to create collaborative
texts, the discrepancy between his limited literacy skills and their proficiency
became an issue. His peers' pointed criticism of his extremely non-standard
spelling and their insistence on 'helping him' operated to disrupt his sense of
self as writer. Not only did their assessment of his ability mark him as less-than; their preoccupation with his spelling and punctuation prevented him from participating in the creative aspect of writing. Essentially, they recreated the model of writing he had experienced in other years. However, astonishingly, the conflict that was created by negative peer response did not ‘shut him down’. Unlike the potentially silencing effect of teacher criticism, peer criticism motivated Rico to develop further. His initial response was to withdraw from the social interactions with his peers, but he kept on writing. When he eventually rejoined his peers, he chose for himself what peer input he would take, and what he would leave. He welcomed direct contributions from peers regarding content and steadfastly rejected assistance with mechanics.

**Peer Interactions as a Catalyst in Developing Writing: The Good with the Bad**

**Developing Motivation: Writing for an Audience**

When Rico read his Garfield text at the author’s share, the reward of his peers’ praise gave him an external purpose for continued writing, and Rico began to write pieces to perform.

In his text he again began with the traditional opening line, “once upon a time”, this time transforming his real life experience of walking his dog Axel into an imaginative story. The two short lines of this story represented a monumental leap for Rico; both in the development of a personal purpose for print, as well as in his appropriation of conventional story grammar as a
scaffold for his own text. These lines did not come easily, however, and
almost two weeks of writing and wandering passed before he shared this story.

Once upon a time a little fox named Rico and his dog named Axel, they were lonely, they were walking.

In the next story, Rico again wrote on the theme of loneliness, with a ‘happy ending’ that reflected his own emerging experiences in the classroom. The metaphor he created of the boy and wolf meeting each other halfway was reflective of his own process as he began to form social relationships with his peers.

Once upon a time there was a lonely wolf and a lonely boy. The boy went walking and the wolf was walking too and they went so far they bumped into each other. They weren’t lonely no more and they loved each other.

Talk Alone Does Not Create a Text: Frustrations with Peer Collaborators

Up to this point in early September, Rico had continued to compose alone, participating in the ‘community of writers’ only through the sharing of his final written products. However, while composing the wolf story, he was seated at a table near several of his peers who were loudly discussing football. He found these discussions so interesting that he abandoned his written narratives and joined in the conversation. After several days of mostly discussion, Rico’s text consisted of the title “The Football Game”, and, in their handwriting, the signatures of his partners.

The football Game
Rico team Jaime RomanM RomanG Santana

Two significant issues surfaced in this interaction. Firstly, while Rico clearly enjoyed ‘hanging out’ with the other boys and talking, he was really
invested in creating a text. He was developing a sense of himself as an author, and he wanted to write. However, his more skilled peers were less interested in his ideas than in correcting his text; or rather, equally interested in both form and content. This emphasis meant that they constantly interrupted the flow of story line to correct his spelling. Secondly, the football theme was not significant for Rico. He was not really interested in developing themes divorced from his own experience and even his imaginative stories were based on fictionalized accounts from his personal experiences

Although Rico originally found the football discussions attractive, the desire to ‘tell a story’ clearly outweighed the opportunity for social interactions, and he returned to storytelling on his own, elaborating on his previous theme of foxes to produce his longest text of the year so far.

Ons A pun A time tar wus A DaD fos and A mom fox and 2 lito BaBes Thay wre wacing and wocing and they stopt and tay soo A haws and thay want I in siyd and aet and I wokt in siyd I sote Ma and I kipt tham and I tuk tam to scool Thay liykt tham

(Once upon a time there was a dad fox and a mom fox and two little babies. They were walking and walking and they stopped and they saw a house and they went inside and ate and I walked inside I shouted, “Ma!” and I kept them and I took them to school and they liked them)

**Conflict among Collaborators: But I Don’t Want Your Help!**

Again, at sharing time, peer response to the content was extremely positive but several of his classmates commented on his ‘weird spelling’. Rico was aware that his spelling was non-standard, but he relied on environmental print and peers for spellings only when he was not actively engaged in composing. That is, he appealed to his classmates and me for standardized spellings in order to facilitate clerical tasks in Writer’s
Workshop such as maintaining lists of his texts and dating pieces. As many of his classmates began increasingly to incorporate standardized spellings, they frequently criticized and corrected each other's works-in-progress. Rico, however, was frustrated by his peers' habit of correcting his spelling while he was busily composing. This behavior so disrupted his process that he often isolated himself under a table to write, with an arm shielding his text from view. Thus, while many of his classmates were now actively collaborating to create texts, Rico continued to write alone.

The Need to Take Your Time

Shortly after Halloween I began to read The Twits by Roald Dahl at the end of each day. After several days my students mutinied against the chapter-a-day reading and insisted that I finish the book in a single sitting. Rico loved the book; delighted at the complicated ways the Twits conspired and retaliated to make each other miserable. He settled down with the book itself and attempted to copy a chapter. He traced pictures of Mr. Twit's beard with bits of decaying food, drawing instead beans and carne asada tangled in his whiskers. He discussed other revolting ways the Twits could get back at each other, laughing hysterically. And, after several days, he wrote the following text:

(Best friend October
The twits Rico
I order a pizza and I dege sume wormse to pect the sen off the pzza to put the wormse in siD it like A sanwed.
I will Biy A fuss bol and put it unDr His cuvrs
I will)

(Best friend October
the twits Rico
I order[ed] a pizza and I dug some worms [and] picked the skin off the pizza [and] put the worms inside it like a sandwich.
I will buy a fuzzball and put it under his covers
I will)
Performing Under Peer Pressure

Rico was so excited about writing this piece, and had engaged in so much discussion about it that he found it impossible to keep his peers at bay. As soon as he put the last word on the page they badgered for him to read. Rico remonstrated that he wasn’t ready, and Marco appeared to come to his rescue, shooing their classmates away. But then he himself sat down next to Rico, still an expectant audience, albeit of one. But for Rico, an audience of one was still an audience and he was compelled to perform. In all my student writers I had observed a need to prepare before sharing their texts with peers, although frequently this preparation was little more than a final scanning of the text. For Rico and other emergent writers, however, it was extremely important to make sure that they could successfully read their own nonstandard or idiosyncratic spellings. Poor Rico, prematurely forced into sharing before he had had a chance to review his writing, struggled with the text:

Rico: (reading over his text) Get some worms to.. What’s this? And I dug some worms to take the skin off the pizza. To take the skin off the pizza to put the worms.. on the worms, in..? (He continues to read and reread silently)

Marco: Need help, Rico?
Rico: Yeah.
Marco: Where, this?
Rico: Yeah
Marco: Sid.. What is it, sid?
Rico: (ignoring Marco) Oh! And
Marco: You don’t know what you wrote?
Rico: (Looking imploringly at me) I forgot it.

Tenaya and Raquel come over to ‘help’, reading over Rico’s shoulder. They miscue on the first line.

Q and S: I ordered pizza and salad
Rico: (taking over, emphatically) AND I PICKED THE SKIN
OFF THE PIZZA TO PUT THE WORMS.
Raquel: (dismissingly) He has sloppy writing (she leaves)
Rico: to put worms in.
Tenaya: in pizza?
Rico: No.
Tenaya: Where are you?
Rico: There.
Tenaya: (studying text) in s-s-s, in s-o, IN SOFA
Rico: (ignoring her) Put it like a sandwich.
Marco: (Beginning at the first line, miscuing) I ordered a pizza and I
changed.
Rico: NO. I’m right there, Marco.
Marco: Sandwich. No, it’s sid
Tenaya: (echoing) That’s sid
Rico: No.
Marco: S-I-D, sid
Tenaya: Yes, it is.
Marco: (turning to me) Ain’t it? It says sid.
Israel: It could be, What did you want it to be, Rico?
Rico: Can I read the end, that I did with Roman?
Israel: Yeah. You wanted sandwich?
Rico: Yeah, like a sandwich. Sandwich’s way over there, though.
(He points to his text where the word sandwich appears several
lines farther on. He skips the troublesome section and reads the last
line of text.)
Rico: I will buy a fuzzball and put it under his cover.

After this difficult reading, his classmates again returned to their own projects.

However, Rico was not ready to give up on this text. He came to sit with me and went
over each word of his text, trying to match the print with his original intention. When he
discovered he had written “in sid” for “inside” and his meaning became clear, he was
delighted.

Rico: Yeah! I order a pizza and I dug some worms to take up the skin
off the pizza to put the worms (checking the text again) Yeah, the
worms INSIDE it like a sandwich.
Withdrawing From the Community of Writers: Regaining Autonomy

Up until this point, for Rico, the most powerful motivation for writing had come from the opportunity to share the written product with his peers. After this experience of struggling to read his Twit-inspired story before his critical classmates, Rico spent the next few sessions writing and illustrating a personalized version of Hansel and Gretel. He put considerable effort into this piece, writing in fancy script, but refused all peer assistance. While his classmates now were extremely invested in ‘helping him spell’, Rico was proportionately invested in resisting their tutelage. He rejected the notion that he needed help. For Rico, being a writer meant having a story to tell, and telling it well. He resented his classmates’ insistence that spelling was necessary for storytelling. He had achieved much of his classroom status through presenting his texts, and jealously guarded against any implications of failure that might impinge on his status as storyteller/writer. For the first time, Rico chose not to share his story, and once completed he simply filed the text in his writing folder.

I was in the woods.
I saw a house full of candy. I ate and ate and the witch caught me.
She said come here. I said no, and I ran as fast as I can.
She got her broom and flew
And I hid under the house.
She flew over me.
The End

We had all come to look forward to Rico’s sharing at our daily author’s chair, and Rico’s refusal to read his stories had a powerful effect on his classmates. They begged
him to read the Hansel and Gretel story, which he flatly refused to do. I was really intrigued by his refusal. It was obvious that he could reread this text easily. In fact, he had rechecked this piece for readability many times before filing it away. However, neither his classmates, nor I could convince him to share it. Perhaps we were being ‘punished’ for failing to appreciate his Twits story, or perhaps that experience had been deeply painful and he was truly reluctant to risk it again. For whatever reason, it was several weeks later, just before December vacation, before Rico again shared a story.

**Talk and Text: Conversations Facilitating Writing**

Rico came to talk with me as I took notes on the ‘state-of-the classroom’. He was stuck. He wanted to write about his dogs, and as we both had rottweilers, wanted some ideas. As we were talking, Rocco and Roberto joined us and began discussing the cost of a dog. It is significant that in the following conversation Rico actually asked for a spelling. This was his first direct request for peer assistance since the Twit’s story.

Rico: Rott cost a lost of money.

Chico: You don’t need to pay money. If you have a girl, because she’l have babies.

Mario: If you have a boy.

Tenaya: (coming by to comment on her way to another table) Oh, I have to draw a picture of my THREE dogs.

Mario: You don’t have a dog!

Rico: No, she don’t teacher, ‘cause I know where she lives.

(Begins to draw a rottweiler) How do you spell ‘rule’?

Mario: r-u-l-e.

Rico writes “dogs rule and cats drule”

Mario: Someone that loves cats is gonna be mad at you

This conversation marked the first time that discussion with peers directly facilitated the development of Rico’s written text. His classmates were by now extremely aware of the effect their previous editing suggestions had had on him, and unless he
specifically asked for help they rarely suggested spellings to him again. This sensitivity may actually have prevented Rico from making some of the gains in standardized print that I observed in collaborators who routinely corrected each other's work. However, I felt that the gains Rico made in developing as an author as a result this peer restraint more than outweighed the costs to conventional spelling and punctuation.

Section Three

Overview of Section Three

By early spring Rico had pretty well established a successful way to compose and had found a creative balance between peer assistance and peer interference. His confidence as a writer, bolstered by peer response and his burgeoning writing folder made it possible for him to consider other possibilities for print, and to further develop his own intentions for his texts. Over the next period of time, Rico wrote for a growing variety of purposes. He wrote rebuttals to peer comments about his beloved dog, created both non-fiction and fictionalized accounts of current sports events, and created a unique character in print for an oral performance. His voice as a writer did not escape the admiring notice of his peers, which in turn motivated him to continue to explore the possibilities.

As the year's end approached and I reevaluated Rico's growth, I became fearful of how Rico's progress (and my teaching) might be judged and found substandard according to the criteria of discrete writing skills. I lost sight of my goals for developing critical literacy: the use of print for a variety of personal purposes, to create possible worlds, influence others, reflect, entertain, and above all have a developing sense of efficacy as a writer and social actor— all of which Rico now demonstrated— and reverted to form-
driven writing instruction. This paradigm shift created an obvious discontinuity for Rico as he struggled to be a writer according to teacher-imposed criteria divorced from his own purposes.

**Developing Intentions and Purposes for Print**

**Writing to Respond**

Rico’s story about his dogs provoked a lot of classroom discussion about dogs in general, and Rico’s dogs in specific.

Rico
My Dogs
My Dogs ar nos
Oun got bet
It was the rot buy getting ina fit weh my her dog

(Rico My Dogs. My dogs are nice. One got bit. It was the Rott, by getting in a fight with my other dog)

Children who knew Rico’s dogs commented that it didn’t make sense that the Rottweiler had gotten bitten. After all, Rottweilers were known for being tough! The children who lived next door to him also commented somewhat disparagingly that Rico’s Rottweiler had a long tail (rather than docked). For the first time, Rico responded to his commentators in print, adding the following lines the next day, and rereading the entire modified text.

…Becuys the rot is scard of the atr dog becos the atr dog is biger and the rot dus hava his tel and I like it like tat.

(Because the Rott is scared of the other dog because the other dog is bigger, and the Rott does have a tail and I like it like that)

This amended text represented another benchmark in Rico’s literacy development as he included editorial to his uses for print.
Revising Reality: Creating Possible Worlds in Print

In January the Superbowl furor spilled into the classroom and football stories dominated Writer’s Workshop. His peers’ obsession with the playoffs was contagious, and Rico composed two stories on that theme. In the first text, he presented a factual account of the game:

January
The Super Bole is on Sundy
49ers and the Cowboys
The Cowboys won the 49ers The suor was 22 to 4
I was sad but I stil like the 49er

In the second story he again demonstrated his developing critical literacy as he manipulated print to get a reaction from his classmates. Loyalties to the two vying teams had created intense friction among the children, and those whose loyalties lay with the underdog were left with little to say. However, Rico alone used print to present an alternative and vastly more satisfying fictionalized outcome to the championship game.

The NFL camencep
The Egols won 31 to 17 The Cowboys lost Big Time
The Egold are in the Super Bowl
The Dalls cried becase theay waned to be in the Superbowl
Egols rolls and the cowgrils droe

This retaliatory response met with tremendous acclaim on the part of his fellow
49ers fans, whose own print voices had been silenced by the actual outcomes of the game. They were deeply appreciative. That only Rico had thought to use print to create a different reality did not escape the notice of his peers. Once again his ventures with storytelling served to elevate his status among his classmates, and to cement Rico's own self-perception as an author.

**Connecting Talk and Text: Experiments with Playwriting**

Soon after Rico's fictionalized account of the Superbowl game, several groups of children began to work together on performance pieces. This writing activity occupied the whole class for many weeks. They wrote somewhat limited scripts on the computer, having discovered how easy that made it to print out the multiple copies necessary for each partner. They made Popsicle-stick puppets and other props for their performances, and began to do whole group choral readings of the narrative text, rather than creating specific roles for each member of the group. While more time during this period was spent performing the pieces than actually writing them, they remained aware that print was a required component of the process. As one student commented, "If you're doing a play you got to do a story, even ask Mrs. Israel." Even after football theme (thankfully) began to wear thin, classroom interest in producing plays remained strong. Rico was invited to join in with a group of children who were creating a play with a complicated story line and a cast of thousands. Rico successfully convinced his peers that there could be more than one dog although the role of the dog had already been taken by Tenaya. He spent a great deal of time in discussion with his fellow playwrights and in creating props for the performance. However, when I insisted that the actors show me their scripts, Rico
presented the following text:

Woof, woof, I am on a collar. Don’t you hate that? I wish I can break this chain so I can catch the cats and have me a barbecue. I am doing bones with salsa and call the other dogs and have a feast. Hope my owners don’t get mad.

At the final performance this characterization brought the house down. Rico’s peers proclaimed that he even sounded like a dog.

Teacher Interference in the Writing Process: Paradigm Warp

I admired the emergence of Rico’s very strong voice as a writer, but I began to worry over his limited acquisition of standardized spellings and other conventions of print. While I felt philosophically supported regarding my desire to foster voice and purpose in my student writers, I was concerned that the emphasis on content over form might be a liability for Rico the following year. Over the next few weeks I engaged my students in writing activities outside of Writer’s Workshop in an attempt to create a bridge between imagination and convention. Writer’s Workshop remained unchanged and unchallenged as THEIR writing time, where the story to tell had precedence over all other concerns. But, at other points during the day I encouraged my students to become aware of editing issues, and to consider the form of their writing. Rico continued to bring a high level of creativity to these exercises, and, when so prompted, created more easily readable texts. In response to the assignment to create a personal text with ‘feeling words’, Rico wrote the following sentences:

My dog got het I was unhappy
My brother went to jail, I was disappointed.
My mom got slapped, I was sad.
My dog ran away, I was upset.
My friend is not my friend, I am angry.
My birthday came [and] I did not know how old I was, I was irate.

(My dog got hit, I was unhappy.
My brother went to jail, I was disappointed.
My mom got slapped, I was sad.
My dog ran away, I was upset.
My friend is not my friend, I am angry.
My birthday came [and] I did not know how old I was, I was irate)

Derailing Student Intentions for Print

Rico did fairly well on creating more standardized texts as a writing assignment. However, the emphasis I had placed on creating readable texts had an immediate negative effect on Rico’s writing in Writer’s Workshop. He became hyperaware of his spelling, and began to second-guess his instincts with disastrous effects. On the occasions when he appealed to his peers for help, their zealous over-corrections robbed him of any sense of competence as a speller. He had already developed a pretty good awareness that spelling was an arbitrary science, and in his next texts he suffered every word. The following text is representative of his process as he struggled with this issue:

My Dog

My dog is mean. He gets mean when you put your shoes by his nose, and if you put him on a bunk bed he will get scared and cry, and he will cry all night. And when my mom comes in my room he gets happy and he won’t let her get him down.

(My dog is mean. He gets mean when you put your shoes by his nose, and if you put him on a bunk bed he will get scared and cry, and he will cry all night. And when my mom comes in my room he gets happy and he won’t let her get him down.)
Section Four

Overview of Section Four

Rico, disconnected from his own process as a writer, sought out his peers by participating as a creative consultant in their texts. These interactions served to reconnect him with his own goals as a writer, and thankfully, he returned to the successful strategies he had previously employed. With his sense of authority restored, Rico reached a new level of collaboration. In choosing his collaborators over creative autonomy he was able enter the creative world of his peers. As a confident writer, Rico now rolled with the punches in Writer's Workshop. He was no longer easily distracted by peer criticism, although he rarely asked for critique. If his classmates chose to work on topics that didn’t interest him, he comfortably worked alone. A sense of community permeated Writer’s Workshop whether students were actively co-creating texts or not. Children stopped to share a word or two, admire an illustration, and listen to the newest sentence. Writers in the presence of other writers, Rico and his classmates became tacit collaborators. The intimacy that developed among us all made Writer’s Workshop a powerful arena for sharing, risk-taking, and connecting.

Pulling it All Together: Reclaiming the Process of Being a Writer

Collaborating and Co-authoring

Rico became more frustrated with his own compositions as he tried to comply with the emphasis on correctness. In desperation to be an author again, he turned to work with his peers, participating with them on the creation of texts by contributing ideas. He began to collaborate with Marco on a piece about swimming at the local pool. At the first draft
of the piece Marco printed out two copies, one for each of them, and Rico benefited tremendously from the choral reading performances. Rico in turn made himself invaluable to Marco, acting as intermediary between the boys and me as we negotiated issues of appropriate language versus freedom of speech. Over the next two weeks Rico shared in several choral readings of the text as it went through various editing stages, even getting himself written in as a protagonist in the final version of the story. (See also Marco, p 155) He included the following text in his own writing folder, indicating that he too felt a sense of ownership/authorship towards the piece:

Sunnyside Pool
I like the Sunny Side Pool because we could swim but we get clorox in are eyes and we get to jump off the diving board and we get to were like jackets and we pay a quarter to get in Sunnyside Pool me and other people have fun and we get to go to the bathroom and take a shower and you can’t wear flotes and it is the BOMB and the girls are fine and the life guard saved Rico and the fine girls kissed Rico and the fine girls kissed Frank and they kissed Marco too.

Creating Alliances through Collaborative Texts and Vice Versa

Rico was continuing to write with Marco, Frank and Roman, when Roman was unexpectedly pulled out of Writer’s Workshop by his LD tutor due to a conflict with his resource room scheduling. This created tension among the three remaining collaborators because Roman, a fervent 49ers fan, had acted to mediate topic selection in the group. Without Roman, Marco lobbied hard and fast to get his peers to agree to a pro-Cowboys story. Surprisingly, the desire for solidarity with Marco won out, and both Rico and Frank, heretofore dyed in the wool 49ers fans, readily abandoned both their team and their absent classmate. Rico also included a printout of this text in his own
writing folder, although Marco and Frank had done all the typing of the text.


The Collaborative Effect of Community: Writing Among Friends

By the beginning of May, with the end of the school year in sight, Marco and Frank were collaborating on a story based on experiences they shared, that Rico did not. Without distress, Rico returned to his pattern of composing alone. On his own he consulted with me several times over appropriate topic and word choice, writing a story based on Bevis and Buthead. This was very interesting to me, because I rarely censored anything children chose to write, other than infrequently preventing a child from publicly sharing a piece that deliberately insulted a classmate. Rico was very clear as to the cause of his caution. His texts were written to share. He might choose himself to keep a text private, but he did not want that choice made for him. After verifying that I would let him write (and say) "Buthead", "chicks", "rap", "stupid", and "cool, dude", he presented the following text:

Bevas
Hey dewd, look at those cheks. Hey Buthead, wont to lisen to raps? Do you won’t to Do [you] want to go out with those cheks if they are sutped? And thay [went] out with me and Buthead cool Dewd Buthead, le go to gat food like Pezze Hut
(Bevis
Hey dude, look at those chicks. Hey Buthead, you want to listen to rap? Do you want to? Do you want to go out with those chicks if they are stupid? And they went
out with me and Buthead, cool, dude. Buthead, lets go to get food like Pizza Hut

On the last few days of school we spent a lot of time talking and visiting with each other. I knew I would not be returning to Palo Verde School, and, barring a trip to the school to visit them, would not be seeing my students after the end of the year. This was difficult for me as well as for them, because we had become good friends. With few exceptions, perhaps as a result of our many conversations, almost all the children ended the year’s writing with personal narratives. Buddy, too, wrote one last story about his dogs.

ME AND MY DOGS
I LIKE TAKING HIM FOR A WALK BUT I HATE WHEN HE RUNS TO FAST AND HE IS A ROTWILER AND A BANGE DOG AND A POT POMERRANIN AND PORT CEWOWO THE BANGE DIG IS NICE TO KIDS THE CEWOWO BITS AND THE ROTWILER IS NISE BUT KIDS AOR ARFAD OF HEM

(Me and My Dogs
I like taking him for a walk but I hate when he runs too fast and [I have?] a Rottweiler and a Benji dog and a part Pomeranian and part Chihuahua. The Benji dog is nice to kids. The Chihuahua bites, and the Rottweiler is nice but kids are afraid of him.)

Reflections on Rico

As I reviewed my year with Rico, I was struck by how fragile his own perceptions of writing and being a writer were, and how easily crushed in the face of a differing and authoritatively presented perspective. However, while examining his documents and the interactions surrounding them, a significant pattern appeared. I noted that while both teacher and peer critique alike created an immediate fracture in Rico’s beliefs about writing, his response to the different detractors was very different. When presented with teacher-directed assessments of what writing was; such as valuing form over content, or
correctness over imagination, Rico was quick to conclude that his own differing viewpoint was at fault and struggled to adopt the teacher-directed statement. However, when critiqued by his peers, after an initial withdrawal, Rico either adapted the opposing position into his own framework, or actively rejected it. That is, peer conflict actually served to force him to reevaluate his position. That he didn't simply ignore peer criticism speaks to the powerful need to belong to the group. Writer's Workshop became a rare classroom space in which both autonomy and collaboration coexisted in harmony. Even I could participate as writer and collaborator in that environment, hopefully allowing my students to benefit from my more extensive experiences as a writer. However, when I reverted to teacher-directed instruction it was nearly impossible for Rico to withstand the overwhelming weight of that voice.

Concerns for His Future Schooling

From a simple comparison of Rico's first text in August:

Witt surt blu sorrs. Brawn sus blak her

to his last text in May:

'Me and My Dogs
I like taking my dog for a walk but I hate when he runs to fast'.

it was obvious that he had made tremendous gains as a writer in all areas, transcription, purpose, voice. However, in spite of this growth, he still fell far below grade-level in the mechanics of writing. Because Rico's gains had all come about through peer interactions, and the effect of teacher-directed writing instruction had been to shut him down, I worried that future teacher attempts to provide remedial instruction would rob him of his sense of authorship.
Case Study Two

Introducing Tenaya

Tenaya was the only non-Spanish speaking Black child in our room and she entered the classroom on guard. She fought with her classmates and me, and rejected all our overtures for friendship. She had been labeled LD, which in her case meant that she did not appear to be able to read, and when forced to write employed an idiosyncratic or possibly haphazard choice of letters that neither she nor I were able later to read.

At first Tenaya wrote with her peers only to benefit from their knowledge of letters and sound; she didn’t welcome friendship with her classmates. She was quick to appropriate her peers’ strategies of repeated phrases, and reveled in the sheer length of her repetitive text.

Her first acts to negotiate a relationship were though love letters to me. From a distance she watched me read her letters. She watched me respond to her classmates’ requests for spellings. She watched her peers collaborate, and finally she joined in. She wrote successfully (i.e., she was able to read her written texts at the daily author’s share, to her peers approval), for several months. At mid-year, however, although her own development as a writer was remarkable, there was still a discrepancy between her still limited skills, and those of her peers. This discrepancy manifested itself after the publication of the first anthology of collected student writings when she was unable to join in when her classmates shared their texts. Her peers increasing excluded her from reading and writing with them, and she tried a variety of ways to write herself into a space in the room. She tried to participate with a group of children by writing about what
interested them—rottweilers. She tried to woo her peers by including popular sports theme in her writing. She tried to impress them by incorporating a ‘kitchen sink’ approach to her writing, thus creating an impressively long but incoherent text. None of these strategies worked to reconnect her with her peers. Finally her developing relationship with Raquel provided an entrance back into the literacy club and she began to collaborate with Raquel on a variety of shared texts. She participated with her classmates by creating a character for the group play, and for the first time, began to write and read fictionalized narratives of her life—a vision of what might be.

In April, LD testing temporarily replaced her hard won knowledge of writing with a school-based definition that reduced writing to spelling and punctuation, devoid of meaning or purpose. By the end of the year she was able to overcome the destructive effect of that experience and in the final days of school she was again a writer, writing in the company of writers.

Tenaya

On the first day of school Tenaya perched uneasily at a table with four other little girls. She was the only African heritage child in the class. She eyed her classmates suspiciously, waiting for them to confirm her expectations that they would not like her, would treat her unfairly, and would get her in trouble. Tenaya noisily set her folder on the table, her pencil teetering on the edge. Elizabeth reached over to stop it from rolling off.

“Gimme that! That’s not yours you know. You don’t be taking my stuff. Teacher!” Her voice crescendoed. Tenaya’s head wove back and forth, her
elaborate braids swinging, her hand tucked on her hip. Elizabeth was speechless, open-mouthed.

When it was time for Writer’s Workshop, Tenaya became restless.

“I can’t write,” she said.

“Oh, I bet you can,” I said, taking out my own folder, picking up a pencil.

On this first day of school I did not want to define for her topics, or methods. She gathered a stack of paper and a green marker, and after a little delay, began to write. After each sentence she read out loud, punctuating the end of each line with a click of her tongue. I took rapid notes as she read because her system of transcribing the words other than I LIKE was so non-standard as to make re-encoding impossible.

A cursory look at Tenaya’s file indicated that she had been identified as having a ‘learning disability’. Her non-mainstream dialect of English was not recognized as a language variety, and so she was also labeled as having ‘general language deficiencies’.

At the end of the one of the first days of school my third-grade teammate and I were slumped next to the coffee machine when Tenaya came in, accompanied by several other second and third grade girls. Tenaya wanted to dance. She badgered her friends into doing what she called a ‘cheer’. These were choreographed songs and dance moves executed like a kinesthetic call and response.

Hey Tenaya
Yeah?
Do you wanna go down?
How YOU gonna go down?
D-O-W-N that’s the way you go down
Huh, D-O-W-N that’s the way you go down?”
Yeah!
Hey Maria...
Tenaya recited and danced, leading her friends in cheer after cheer, until laughing, they had had enough, and quit. I was struck by the discrepancy between this performance and the assessments in her cumulative folder. I was dismayed to consider the interaction of Tenaya’s ways with words—her culturally influenced patterns of discourse—with the privileged discourse of the assessments, a collision that found her substandard and in need of remediation. For her, as for my other students, I hoped that participation in a writing community would bring her in from the margin, into a place where she could share both who she was, as well as explore her possible selves.

Section One

Overview of Section One

Tenaya’s literacy development was beleaguered by several factors. She received instruction in a program of regularized phonics lessons that did not encourage her to make connections about print based on her own sense of language. Additionally, her dialect of English did not share the phonemes of Standard English on which the instructional program was based, further confounding the opportunity for her knowledge of language to mediate the acquisition of print literacy. Thus, reading and writing became completely teacher directed tasks, devoid of meaning and notion of personal purpose.

Barriers to Acquiring Literacy

Tan Bats, Fans, and Vans: Writing for ‘Success’ in the Remedial Program

Tenaya, having been classified as LD, had in prior years received all of her literacy instruction from a Specialist whose remedial program relied entirely on rote memorization
of regularized phonics lessons. She was provided with laminated cards with lists of word families in order to compose. She was not encouraged to try to make sense of the letter sound relationships, or to use ‘creative spellings’ in any way. And, as long as Tenaya chose to compose sentences about tan bats, fans, and vans, and pigs in wigs dancing jigs, she created ‘successful texts’, i.e., texts that she and others could later read.

However, without the safety net of a controlled spelling vocabulary, Tenaya was left with little support for creating meaning in print. On the morning of the first day of school, in response to the writing prompt to describe a fellow student, Tenaya produced the following text:

8-14-96
1. Khrystle is my mptb blDa
2. Khrystle in a bot tran
3. Khrystle LT mn Tran
4. Khrystle bot
5. Jazmetmt

Tenaya had carefully written letters to represent the words in her text, mimicking her peers as they composed. However, her knowledge of letter-sound match was limited, and her inability to read (or recall) her own message left her silenced and confused. Little wonder that she announced to me during Writer’s Workshop that she couldn’t write.

**Interruptions and Disrupted Process**

Tenaya’s LD label meant that she was frequently called away for resource support during Writer’s Workshop. Sometimes the scheduling appeared to give her a welcome break from the exhausting task of creating a system of transcription for the stories she wanted to tell. (It often seemed that the exhaustion stemmed from the compromises she was forced to make
between the stories she began to want to tell, and the stories she actually, with her limited system, could tell.) More frequently, though, the pull-out program divorced her from her fledgling collaborations with her peers and disrupted her developing strategies for creating social relationships through text, and texts through social relationship (Dyson 1989).

Section Two

Overview of Section Two

Learning to Write

Within our classroom, Tenaya resisted using the controlled scaffold of the word cards of her phonics program, and experimented with alternative strategies for writing. By incorporating environmental print into her narratives she was able to write lengthy texts that satisfied her requirement of readability.

Experimenting with Systems for Transcribing

I don't know why Tenaya did not simply use the word-cards from her LD classroom to compose, particularly because her motivating goal was to be able to read her texts successfully. When questioned, she always answered 'I don't know'. Perhaps she wanted to create texts more like those of her peers, or simply welcomed the opportunity for creativity. For whatever reason, Tenaya actively searched for ways to create a message beyond the restraints of the controlled vocabulary of the cards. She chose the words I LIKE from the cards, and then she searched the classroom blackboards and bulletin boards for environmental print to create this second text:

I like sports
I like bathroom
I like blue

She was able to read this at the author's share, which delighted her. The success she experienced at being able to share her texts was enormously motivating for Tenaya. Her previous experiences with writing had not developed the notion of a story to tell, or any other purpose—so she didn’t really care what her texts were about. What she wanted was to be able to read her message later to her peers. She had begun to work out ways of expanding her print world beyond the one-syllable pattern-words of the word-cards. She could with, some success, produce some meaning on paper, come back later and still be able to read it.

Expanding Writing Strategies

Tenaya had hit on a useful strategy for creating texts of substantial length, and she continued with the repetitive I LIKE stories for several weeks.

Her texts of mid-August and early September showed her reliance on this method, although she had also begun to experiment with creative spelling:

I like to read
I like to raay
I like to eelit
I lik to school
I lik to wrok
I lik to plat

I like to read
I like to reat
I like to joly
I like to eelit
Section Three: Writing with Others

Overview of Section Three

Peer interactions provided Tenaya with new opportunities for developing literacy. She appropriated both peer methods and purpose for writing, which were demonstrated in her repetitive text and attempt at personal narrative. She also began to experiment with the print as a tool for making social connections.

Early Collaborative Experiences

Appropriating Peer Strategies and Purposes

By mid September Tenaya had begun to write at a table with Esther and Khrystle. Neither Esther nor Khrystle were particularly fluent writers (that is, they had not gained enough mastery over the sound system to write freely, able to focus on their purpose rather than the manner of transcription), did not incorporate much standardized print into their texts, and both employed highly idiosyncratic creative spellings in their texts. This made writing a laborious process for both of them. However, they had clear, if differing, intentions for their texts. Esther was interested in creating pieces of length. Her goal for each writing session was to create a piece to share, and the content was of secondary importance. Khrystle, on the other hand, was motivated by the desire to tell a good story, and spent a lot of time thinking about what she would write next. As Tenaya continued to write at their table she began to incorporate aspects of both of their composing strategies into her own writing.
She admired a repetitive story that Esther had written, impressed by the sheer number of lines. "And the clock ticked one and the clock ticked two and the clock ticked three..." Tenaya appropriated the repetitive pattern of Esther's story and employed in her own texts. Khrystle's influence showed up in the details of personal narrative that she included in her text. Her next writings also included longer final sentences that elaborated on a theme from her own personal narrative, and also demonstrated a move away from total reliance on the standardized spellings she gleaned from classroom labels and other environmental print:

- I like school (I LIKE SCHOOL)
- I like to work (I LIKE TO WORK)
- I like to play (I LIKE TO PLAY)
- I like book (I LIKE BOOKS)
- I like to play on the playground (I LIKE TO PLAY ON THE PLAYGROUND)
- I like to play with Chico (I LIKE TO PLAY WITH CHICO)
- I like to read (I LIKE TO READ)
- I like to eat (I LIKE TO EAT)
- I like books (I LIKE BOOKS)
- I like to play (I LIKE TO PLAY)
- I like to flip (I LIKE TO FLIP)
- I like cream (I LIKE [ICE] CREAM)
- I like to play on the seesaw (I LIKE TO PLAY ON THE SEESAW)

**Building Relationships Through Print and Interactions with Print**

**You or the Best I love you**

As a result of her pullout program, Tenaya enjoyed just a few writing sessions in which she wrote with her peers, and then was prevented by her resource room schedule from participating in Writer's Workshop for about two
weeks. When I was finally able to get her time rescheduled, the writing
collaborations in the classroom had reformed and Tenaya could not find a way
to rejoin her previous partners. For the entire month of October she wrote
letters of affection to me. She created envelopes and stamps, and illustrated
the letters with hearts and animals. Tenaya had discovered a new possibility
for print: creating a social relationship. She also recognized the potentially
public nature of print, and she stood by my shoulder as I read her letters,
making sure that I did not share them with the class.

10/96

I Love You
I like you I love you youor The Best techth

By Tenaya
To M.s.Israel
I Love You
You or Best.

I love you
You or the best
I love I like

I love you
You or the Bset
Techen By Tenaya Jones
You I love
You or the Bset
I love you
Section Four: Peer Influences on Text

Overview of Section Four

Tenaya began to observe her classmates closely as they talked about their texts and shared ideas, and spellings. She began to write seated together with several other girls and their positive response to her provided the support for her longest piece so far—a poem. She came increasingly to rely on her peers for assistance and began to consider her goals for writing as she prepared her poem for publication in the classroom anthology.

Connecting Talk and Text

When Tenaya finally got re-situated with her previous writing buddies, Esther had created another lengthy repetitive text that Tenaya was enormously impressed with. She abandoned her own I LIKE format in search of a new way to create a similarly lengthy text, gathering together paper, a stapler and various drawing supplies. She came to sit next to me, where several other students were also working. She observed curiously the following interaction in which one of her classmates had come to me as resources for spelling.

Chico: (writing) how do you spell bricks?
Israel: What do you think..
Chico: -b-
Israel: uhuh, and -r-
Chico: -i-k (writing down brik and turning away)
Raquel: He is learning to write fast.
Israel: Yes, he is, and you are very kind to mention it.

Tenaya also observed similar interactions among peers as she worked on illustrations at their writing table. She had not yet begun to interact directly
with her peers over texts, but she gravitated to tables where others were actively composing. On this occasion she had just began to do a series of cat drawings while sitting at a table with her earlier writing partner. Raquel and Linette had joined Khrystle in writing a story about Halloween. Although Tenaya did not take a particularly significant part in the interactions, the following dialog marked the beginning of her joining in the conversations about and around the task of writing.

Tenaya is formatting a book, using markers to draw her cats. Khrystle brings her paper over close to Raquel’s to copy the text so far. 

Raquel: Did you put ‘to a’?
Khrystle: What did you write? (rereading carefully, ‘went to get a costume’)
          How do you spell ‘was’?
Tenaya: Y-E-S, right? (to Raquel) Y-E-S, right?
Raquel: What ‘was”? W-A-S?
Tenaya: W-A-S!
Khrystle: I know.

Peer Interactions Supporting Writing Development

Tenaya sat with her classmates every day, watching them create longer and longer texts, and she was determined to write a long story herself. She was equally determined to incorporate her cat illustrations into a text. While coloring in one of her illustrations she hit upon a method for creating a story about multicolored cats, and her strategy was noticed and admiringly remarked upon by Linette.

Tenaya: (writing) Is this a ‘P’? (showing her paper only to Raquel)
Raquel: (to me) See, Tenaya only shows me. Let me see. (nods)
Can I show Linette? (takes a page to Linette’s work space)
Tenaya: My cat’s purple. (writing with a purple marker) She.. No (Changes the color of marker and continues to write)
My cat, by Tenaya. She is yellow. She holds up a yellow crayon, copying the spelling off the paper wrapper.

Linette: (who has returned to this table with Tenaya’s cat drawing) Tenaya’s smart. She went and got yellow and she’s looking at the thing.

Tenaya: (continuing to write) Now’s gonna be the orange cat.

With the added impetus of Linette’s praise, this piece grew to become Tenaya’s longest so far.

My cat dy Tenaya
My cat is purple
I love you
My cat dy Tenaya
My cat dy Tenaya
See is (purple blot) but isd is cat see is blue blue
My cat dy Tenaya
See is yellow but see mean
Yellow
My green dy Tenaya
See is mean but see is mean
My orange dy Tenaya
Dot is mean
See is orang
My red cat by Tenaya
My cat by Tenaya
See is mean
In mes hee see oll sau you
My cat is black
Dua is modr blact
Mean cat cat mean

As in her earlier I LIKE pieces, Tenaya reached a point in the repetition of ‘known words’ where she created a critical mass of text that allowed her to elaborate on her theme—

See is (purple blot) but isd is cat see is blue blue
(She is purple but she is a cat)

Asserting the validity of cathood, regardless of its color, Tenaya then repeated her ‘chorus’ and elaborated again:

See is yellow but see mean
(She is yellow but she is mean).
Tenaya continued this pattern of repeating fall-back or chorus lines (MY CAT BY TENAYA or MY [COLOR WORD] CAT) followed by elaborations throughout the piece until she reached her longest section of creatively and expressively written text:

See is mean
(She is mean)

In mes hee see oll sau you
(If [you] mess [with] her she will scratch you)

She then fell back again on a line of text she could easily control:

My cat is black

and ended the piece with an elaboration and the final chorus:

Dua modr blact
(Their mother is black)

mean cat cat mean

I was amazed at the complexity of this particular text, and found much to support that opinion in studies of social linguistics by Gee (1995, 1997), Heath (1983) and Michaels (1981). In particular, Gee’s analysis of the oral storytelling of an African heritage child suggested that the poetic style of Tenaya’s narrative belied her cultural heritage and made me all the more anxious to support her literacy development in a way that would not eclipse her own ‘ways with words’. Yet, it was her peers’ response to the story that truly created the place for her to experience this voice. They were astonished and admiring, “it’s like a song”, and while they did not welcome her with open arms into the fold, as it were, this had much to do with her own pattern of
isolation and suspicion. However, she began to fight tooth and nail against anything that interrupted her writing time, refusing to attend her pullout program if it conflicted with Writer’s Workshop. The Specialist was inclined to let Tenaya’s interests control her instructional plan, and Tenaya attended the resource room very infrequently. Almost immediately she abandoned the use of random environmental print as a source for word spellings and began to seek out other strategies for conveying meaning in print.

**Viewing Classmates as Resources: “How do you spell rabbit?”**

Tenaya’s next text reflected her new dependence on her peers, and she wrote only when she was assured of having a human dictionary on hand. Esther and Khrystle were engaged in a joint writing project that excluded her, and so she frequently wrote next to Linette and Raquel who were both relatively competent spellers. They were also engaged in their own writing, and not interested in her story per se, but they enjoyed the role of ‘expert’ and were easily distracted from their own texts to provide her with spellings.

Tenaya: Who likes my devil?
(no response, people are writing, thinking)
Tenaya: How do you spell rabbit?
Linette: Rabbit?
Raquel: (going to board) I’ll show you how.
(she writes r-a-b-i-t-e)
Linette: r-a-b-b-i-t
Raquel: Oh, there’s two b’s in rabbit?
Linette: (writing on board) Like this.

The text that Tenaya created with this new peer support represented a balance between strategies for obtaining word spellings, and her intentions for the
story. She again relied on a repetitive story grammar, --I SAW A____-- filling in the blanks with help from her peers. She was quite successful with this strategy although the seventh line --I SAW A DOO [dog]--represents a compromise between intention and skill as her illustration is actually of a teddy bear.

I wont to track or treating
My day it track
My day it track
I saw a deivele
I saw a rabbit
I saw a dooo
I saw a wisch
I saw a claw (clown)

Reconsidering Intentions: Revising for an Audience

By late October I was shopping around for ways to create an “authentic purpose” for promoting text revisions in both content and mechanics, and an Author’s Tea where their pieces would be shared with a parent audience was an obvious option. However, as a class, this group of children produced a lot of texts, and the opportunity for ‘performances’ in the daily authors’ share was an essential part of their motivation to write. Therefore, a conventional Author’s Tea where some of the children would have chance to read a single piece held little appeal. As a result, we developed the idea of a classroom anthology of children’s texts. Over the year we produced four such anthologies in which every child, (with a single exception due to excessive absences) published several pieces. The district’s printing center was extremely generous and printed up sixty spiral bound copies of each of the four anthologies. We were then able to maintain a school collection of the anthologies (in addition to the children’s own individual copy) and these
became a part of our classroom library. In this way my children’s voices shared the bookshelf with the authors of other published works. Contributing to the anthology became the focus of writing over the next writing sessions. Tenaya resurrected her cat story for this first volume. She worked and reworked the text with a variety of peer editors, generally accepting their input even when it appeared to change her meaning. However, against their forceful suggestions, she added back in "My cat, by Tenaya" five times, which maintained the poem-like structure of her original piece. At my suggestion, the final format for her text supported the notion of a poem. At her suggestion, the font was increased to 18pts so that the poem would fill an entire page.

My Cat
Written by Tenaya

My cat, by Tenaya.
She is purple, but she is a cat.
She is blue.

My cat, by Tenaya.
She is yellow, but she is mean.

My cat, by Tenaya.
She is green, but she is mean.
Yes, she is mean.

My cat, by Tenaya.
She is mean, but she is orange.

My cat, by Tenaya.
She is red.
She is mean.
She is mad.
If you mess with her she will scratch you.

My cat is black, but she is mostly black.
Mean, mean cat.
Section Five: Reconnecting with Text through Social Interaction

Overview of Section Five

The publication of the anthology created a rift between Tenaya and her newly-found collaborators. Her inability to share as an equal in reading their texts marked the discrepancy between her skills and theirs. This, and the loss of her best friend, Khrystle, (who moved away) stalled her process. In the absence of peer support Tenaya tried unsuccessfully to apply her earlier strategy of copying environmental print to her own and others' texts. She was clearly motivated by the desire for peer approval, and tried to woo her classmates by including popular sports themes into her texts. Her persistence finally paid off and she was invited to join in a collaborative play. This collaboration provided Tenaya with peer input during her composing process, and mediated her awareness of the discrepancy between her intended text and her actual text.

Losing Her Place

The publication of the classroom anthologies provoked a significant classroom interaction that limited Tenaya's participation in the community of writers she had come to value. When Tenaya tried to join her peers in sharing their published stories, they criticized her lack of skill at reading texts other than her own, and prevented her from participating, as they could, as a reader. Discouraged by their criticism of her reading ability, she returned to writing, alone, reverting to the early composing strategies of directly copying environmental print.

Trying to Connect with Peers and Texts

Over the next several weeks Tenaya struggled to find a way to participate as a member of the writing community. Both Khrystle and Esther had moved out of the Palo
Verde School area and Tenaya was at a total loss for direction in Writer’s Workshop. The rest of the class was obsessed with the anthologies, and were engaged in reading other peoples’ selections. Tenaya tried to read another classmate’s story chorally with Raquel, but her constant miscues were so commented on by her peers, especially the author of the piece, that she was forced to quit. She tried to join in a conversation about dogs with several of the boys who were writing on that theme. However, they were not interested in her obviously made-up account of having three rottweilers and turned her away. Tenaya returned to writing alone, but without the support of fellow-writers, she could not sustain the effort and did not complete any pieces to share. Her folder for early November contained three short texts illustrating three separate strategies for composing.

--Directly copying environmental print from a hallway bulletin board:

   My day on Thanksgiving

--Directly copying the text of a classmate. (This was Khrystle’s story from the anthology):

   My fat tirek eat
   (MY FAT TURKEY EATS)
   15 cor A bay and my fat tirek allwas gete
   (15 CORNS A DAY AND MY FAT TURKEY ALWAYS GETS)

--Relying exclusively on spelling from a classmate to create a repetitive text. In this case Marco shares with her his own non-standard spellings:

   Are rat chekta
   (OUR RAT CHIQUITA)
   Are rat chekta
   (OUR RAT CHIQUITA)
   Gray and white some times

   Tenaya’s expressed sadness over the loss of her writing partners was not unusual in this classroom. The very transitional nature of the population meant that students were
frequently enrolled for relatively short periods of time during the school year and I was sensitive to the grief my students experienced at each move. However, I underestimated the impact of the separation on Tenaya’s membership in the writing community. Only in retrospect did I recognize that it took her all of December and January to reconnect with a new group of writing peers. During that time of disconnectedness, all her writing efforts were directed exclusively toward seeking the approval of her remaining classmates.

**Trying Different Strategies for Peer Approval**

*Even More Cats, Maybe You Like the 49ers, and What About Christmas?*

The class was pretty well divided on gender themes, with only the boys writing about sports. Tenaya, not having much success connecting with the girls, attempted to gain entrée into that arena with her next piece. With the anthology opened to her story, she used the printed text as a springboard.

12/96
My cat by Tenaya
My brown cat
My cat is orangs
My cat green
My cat is yellow

She continued on the same text, working alone, and wrote the following seven lines, relying on her repetitive story grammar of earlier pieces:

49ers
49ers
I like 49ers bebecinig thaa or The Bst.
(I like the 49ers because they are the best)
4Pers 10000
I like the 49ers 1000
I like Mrs Thomas because my techer like the 49ers
I like the 49ers becinig *owz
(I like the 49ers because #1)
In creating this text, Tenaya appealed to her classmates for help with spelling in her first direct peer interaction in many weeks.

Tenaya: How do you spell ‘Christmas’?
Linette: (pointing to Chris’s writing folder) Like Chris and m-a-s. And add a -t- (She demonstrates again, covering the -o-p-h-e-r of CHRISTOPHER with her hand) Like this and m-a-s.

When Tenaya returned to her text, her writing revealed two attempts to use Linette’s strategy. She strung together more unrelated text pieces and completed her writing with a couple of creative spellings:

I like Chistophes
I like Christmas
49#1 Cow gilrs
My Roberta
I like Christmas it is fon (I like Christmas it is fun)
49 49 49 49
49 100*100
I like the 49ers
They are the woon (They are the bomb)

Tenaya got some limited praise from the boys over her inclusion of the 49ers in her text, mostly over her illustrations of football helmet. They were critical of the mixed themes, “she writes about cats, all about cats, that’s all”, and at this point most of the children had switched their loyalties to the Dallas Cowboys. While the class had accepted Tenaya’s previous attribute lists as valid texts, this collection of unrelated themes violated their notions of story. After this mixed success, Tenaya spent the rest of January drawing pictures of cats, even trying to enlist my support to her total claim to that theme.

Tenaya: Well, I’m gonna write my white cat, my purple cat.
Linette: No, I’m going to do that!
Tenaya: No! I been doing that, haven’t I, teacher?
Tenaya eventually wrote this cat story, making another bid for peer approval by illustrating each page with a football helmet which both Rocco and Linette had showed her how to draw. This piece finally resulted in a positive peer response. When she shared there were expressions of appreciation over the details of her careful drawings.

**Through Text to Social Interaction to Interacting with Text**

Tenaya was drawn into the creation of props for a play that several of the other children were working on. This became a source of concern for me, because while most of the other children also participated in writing the scripts, Tenaya appeared to spend most of Writer's Workshop making props. I was just at the point of interfering when she was offered the role of the dog in the play. At that point, in addition to making herself a dog costume of ears, whiskers and a tail, she began to compose her lines of the collaborative script. Her first text for the play did not meet with much approval from her peers, because although at this point Tenaya could read her written text, her spellings were too idiosyncratic for others to read:

```
I nd natt like tat cat  
(I do not like that cat)
I all eat thet can   
(I'll eat that cat)
I all dtea thet can up 
(I'll beat that cat up)
I all dt en thet in Jati 
(I'll put that cat in jail)
I all cat the cat    
(I'll catch the cat)
```

Meanwhile, creating the dialog for the play presented an enormous problem for all the collaborators. They had many discussions over the process of writing down their lines, and finally began to compose with all eight to ten members of the 'cast' sitting together.
This provided another significant interaction for Tenaya, because for the first time she had the support of an expert peer to note the discrepancy between what Tenaya intended to write, and what she actually got onto the page. While Tenaya had enjoyed the support of peer editors in her other writings, they had always been reviewing her previously written texts. This was the first time she had had editorial peer support while in the actual process of writing. In the following conversation, five members of the cast are engaged in various aspects of the play, and eventually settle down to write. Tenaya has just modeled her dog costume, and is a little jealous that June has been given the role of Tenaya’s obviously favorite animal—the cat.

Lisa: I’m making my list, and one of the things I need to do for next Friday is...
All together: Oooh, that costume is so cute, Tenaya.
Lisa: June’s is cute!
Raquel: Yeah, but Tenaya’s is still cute. Sit down and write, Linette!
Tenaya: (taking off her tail and sitting down) I put ruff ruff. Should I put I chase the cat? How do you spell ‘chase’?
June: c-h-a-s-e

The text Tenaya produced in this collaboration met with general approval, and was included in the final script:

Rrof rrof rrof rrof
I chase the cat
I am going to eat
I am going to beat the cat up
I all pul the ers of

(Ruff ruff ruff ruff
I chase the cat
I am going to eat [it]
I am going to beat the cat up
I’ll pul [its] ears off)
Section Six: Personal Narrative

Overview of Section Six

Tenaya’s development as a writer turned from an overriding emphasis on methods of transcribing to the notion of purpose and intentions for her text. She wanted to write her story, not just any story. Unfortunately, her lack of expertise at spelling made her first two attempts unreadable. She then began to copy her partner’s personal narratives, which, while they had little connection to Tenaya’s own life, appeared to facilitate her writing of more readable texts. She then went on to write several of her own personal narratives.

THEN MHE ALL GO SIR:
The Downside of Creative Spelling (or) What did I Write?

In early February Tenaya wrote two pieces independently, both personal narratives. Her creative spellings were so non-standard that she was not able to share them out-loud with her peers, although later she and I were able to reconstruct her intended meaning.

I mee goe to see mee sister then he or goo to the plen
(I’M GOING TO SEE MY SISTER THEN WE ARE GOING TO THE PLANE)
then mhe all go sir got then all go to the plat
(THEN WE’LL ALL GO [undecipherable] THEN WE’LL GO TO PLAY)
then MY sister go to the Dz
(THEN MY SISTER [will] GO TO THE STORE)
then MT all go to the go hooen MY
(THEN WE’LL GO TO MY HOME)
the a sath
(TAKE A BATH)
The go to bae
(THEN GO TO BED)

I clatched my room
(I CLEANED MY ROOM)
I clatched my car
(I CLEANED MY CAR)
I painted to bab
(I PLAYED TODAY
I patinted white my brer
(I PLAYED WITH MY BROTHER)
Styyed hcomt white My ball
(STAYED HOME WITH MY BALL)
Styyed hcomt and kete my ball
(STAYED HOME AND KICKED MY BALL)
I styyed hcomt and stpeo
(I STAYED HOME AND SLEPT)
I styyed hcomt and kete my room
(I STAYED HOME AND CLEANED/KICKED MY ROOM)

The experience of writing and later not being able to share her pieces with her intended audience stopped her from attempting any independent writing for several writing sessions.

Appropriating Narratives: Recopying Text

The next two pieces, which she shared in choral readings with Raquel, were actually her attempt at word-for-word copies of Raquel's texts.

Maria
My old teche Miss mari was very nice to me she drown hear mor anita skin like me She has with olverras like shallk she has. A dlu shorte like me

Maria
My old teacher Miss Maria was very nice. She [had] brown hair, morenita skin like me. She has overalls like chalk. She has blue shorts like me.

This story, while representing a personal narrative for Raquel, had little personal significance for Tenaya. She had not had Miss Maria as a teacher, and, unlike Raquel, did not share the kinship of 'brown hair and morenita skin like me'

The following story about Raquel's baby brother's new tooth, also presented a similar discontinuity of experience for Tenaya
Tenaya Jones
My baby brothe
My baby brothe has a new tooth, now he bites me a lot, and when he never had a tooth, when we were eating he would start to cry because he wanted to eat with us and now he can eat with us.

My baby brother
My baby brother has a new tooth, now he bites me a lot, and when he never had a tooth, when we were eating he would start to cry because he wanted to eat with us. And now he can eat with us.

It was significant that Tenaya, and other students, typically made changes even when copying peers’ texts. The changes ran the gamut from rewriting the text in colored pencil, to changing the names of the characters. A most common strategy was to write a parallel text with a friend, in which every interaction was rewritten with the other child’s name. For example, if Raquel wrote me and Tenaya like tetherball, Tenaya would recopy me and Raquel like tetherball. In this way, the ‘copier’, in this case Tenaya, appropriated both the text and the experience.

Sharing Life’s Experiences and Life’s Possibilities

In March, Tenaya wrote several personal narratives that she shared with her classmates. While they contained several undecipherable words (even for her), they represented such a growth in both purpose and understanding of the mechanical as well as transformative possibilities for print that I was filled with a sense of relief and pride at Tenaya’s accomplishment. She wrote of her friends and family, and although the piece about her mother was truly a fantasy, Tenaya felt safe enough to share this with her peers, who knew where she lived, and who the actual members of her family were. To their credit, none of them chose to make negative comments. This spoke as much to
Tenaya’s success in becoming a member of the classroom community as it did to the kind nature of her classmates:

Tenaya
I play whe my dad and my dad is onoy 24 and my mom is 23
My sister is 20 and
I like to play wah my dad I love hom

I play with my Dad and my Dad is only 24 and my Mom is 23.
My sister is 20 I like to play with my Dad, I love him.

By Tenaya
My frins
I om sleeping it is morning now I am ta school now I sad to my mom I see my frins and my mom wens to brop uof my brathr then sh

By Tenaya
My friends
I am sleeping, it is morning. Now I am at school. Now I said to my mom. I see my friends and my Mom went to drop off my brother and then she

Me and Raquel
Me and Raquellre go toi play teher ball every day
And on the first day of scool I shoud her
Oroond the scool ther we played togetner
The we ceme in and hae spot
Reeding together and then we went to lunch to gether.

Me and Raquel
Me and Raquel go to play tether ball every day
and on the first day of school I showed her around the school, then we played together.
Then we came in and had [some? snack?] Reading together and then we went to lunch together.

These texts also represented a tremendous breakthrough in ‘readability’, as Tenaya finally began to put in to practice her growing knowledge of letters and sounds. That she made these connections essentially on her own, through the negotiation of meaning further bolstered my faith in emphasizing critical literacy over print acquisition.
Section Seven: Claiming Literacy

Overview of Section Seven

The end of the year review threw Tenaya back into a marathon of mandatory LD testing. The discrepancy between her own organic definition of writing and the program definition created an enormous cognitive and affective conflict. Through renewed peer interactions she was able to reclaim her own voice, and end the year writing for her own intentions.

Conflicting Literacy Definitions

The LD Specialist was required to do a year end evaluation, and so in early April Tenaya was pulled out for intensive review and testing. Every day she returned to our classroom a little more deflated and a little more oppositional. She minded losing the opportunity to write with her peers—more than that, perhaps, the experience of total autonomy of choice within that arena. No matter how I tried to organize instruction around the notion of student choice, the autonomy students felt in Writer’s Workshop simply did not occur in other instructional settings.

When the testing was finally completed Tenaya rejoined Writer’s Workshop. Her texts clearly revealed to me the conflict she was experiencing between what she had come to recognize as writing, and what her LD resource program identified as writing.
Recreatin the Journey to Personal Purpose

The first text she shared, written independently, and in physical separation from her peers, was an exercise in using environmental print as she again copied color words off the paper wrappers of the crayons:

4/97
I like blue
I like thistle
I like red
I like burnt
I like yellow
I like green
I like orange
I like pike
I like the me pike

Subsequent texts from that same period include a sticker book in which she relied exclusively on the available pictures to suggest the story-line:

My lion
I hev 3 loveset
I hev a cat
I hev a dog
I hev a brt
I hev 3 blas
I hev 3 cat
I hev 3 dog
And I hev 3 lion

Then Raquel came to join her at her self-imposed exile, and while they did not obviously collaborate, both the tone and the writing strategies of Tenaya’s sticker book changed. Tenaya’s voice began to grow a bit louder, and she again took the risk of using print to express her message, rather than totally constricting her message to the standardized print she had mastered.

I hav a stickers book
I hav andas (animal) stase (stickers) inge my sarses (stickers) book
I hev little bars (bears) in my stares (stickers) book
I hev lanes (lions) in my Book
I hev aned (animals) in my book
I hav a stickers book it is red and it is pedte (pretty) and it look like thes

Just before the year ended, almost a month after her testing experience,

Tenaya finally reconnected with her peers in Writer’s Workshop. In this last interaction, Tenaya was busy working on illustrations for a book about Barbie’s, and Marco had commented that her drawings were very good.

Raquel had lured Tenaya into the collaboration by suggesting that the main characters could be cats instead of girls.

Tenaya; Raquel: Teacher! (Tenaya elbows Raquel in the ribs as Lisa comes over to ‘eavesdrop’)
Raquel (ever resourceful, switches into Spanish, which essentially renders our conversation private, as neither Lisa nor Tenaya speak Spanish)

Sabes que vamos a hacer? Vamos a poner los gatos jugando con barbies, pero los Barbie’s are gonna be rats!

(You know what we’re going to do? We’re going to make the cats be playing with Barbie’s, but the Barbie’s are gonna be rats!)

Here is Tenaya’s final, although unfinished text:

The two cats
Once there was two cats name cadles and chocalet chip
And they were playing Barbie’s
And they whent to eat
Then they went to the park to go to slepe

Reflections on Tenaya

Tenaya remained a challenge for me throughout the school year. I felt that I was engaged in a battle for her very right to learn. The interpretation previously given her IEP indicated that she would not and could not learn. Period.
When I first began to review the data I had collected over the year I was encouraged by the patterns of growth I saw. While her earliest texts demonstrated little awareness of the function or possible purposes for print, there emerged a somewhat progressive pattern of development toward both increased skill and complexity of intention as the year wore on. I say somewhat progressive because the changes in her process were more circular and recursive than linear. I saw her interactions with her peers mature as she negotiated her way into membership into the literacy club, truly writing herself into the room. Her last month of writing demonstrated an interest in telling her stories, both true personal narratives as well as stories to entertain.

Even at the end of the year, Tenaya was still struggling to write what she wanted to with the limited writing tools she had. Without the tools she couldn’t tell the story, and without the story, she couldn’t use the tools. And as with Rico, it was telling her story in the company of friends that motivated her to continue to work so hard to acquire print. For Tenaya, the likelihood that she would be given more time to develop as a writer was slim. In spite of tremendous gains, her achievement did not bring her close to grade level, and there was little chance that her voice would be given precedence over remediating instruction in the year to come.
Case Study Three

Introducing Marco

Marco felt himself, like his classmate, Tenaya, to be ‘the other’ although he wasn’t Black, and shared the Mexican heritage of ninety-five percent of his peers. The one factor that could have claimed for him, his heritage and identity, was Spanish. And, unlike his classmates of similar cultural background, he did not speak Spanish— he was an early victim of language shift (Fishman 1991).

He entered the classroom blustering and defiant, demanding attention, and ended up isolated in corner desk where his talents for distraction would have less effect. As a result, writing became immediately a means for him to leave this desk and connect with his peers. His first collaborations were purely social interactions, partly because neither he, nor his chosen writing partner had acquired the tools for transcribing language. Marco tried to overcome this lack of skill by creating a text that relied entirely on environmental print. The text itself met with limited peer response, but the sharing of it opened the door to collaborations with other classmates. While his earliest writing partners were chosen on the basis of friendship, he came to collaborate with many different partners, chosen for many distinct reasons. He wrote with others because they could help him, because he was interested in the topic they had chosen, because he couldn’t find anyone else, and didn’t want to write alone. By mid-year he had begun to modify his topic selection in order to fit in with the goals of his writing partners—abandoning his own intentions for his narratives in order to maintain the peer interaction.

Shortly after a home visit with his mother and me, Marco began to bring out-of-
school topics into his writings. His participation in a Mexican dance troupe created a connection for him to his ethnicity, and his narratives were full of the details of his cultural heritage—going to Nogales, Sonora, dancing the quebradita, eating carne asada and burritos.

After this point Marco became a fluent writer with many things to say. He often wrote alone, avoiding the negotiations of collaborative writing because he wanted creative control over his story. He wrote alone because he no longer needed the impetus of a group to maintain his process. He wrote alone, because he could rejoin the community of writers by sharing his completed texts, collaborating in the creation of the anthology of collected works, rather than in the creation of his single text.

As the year drew to a close, Marco wrote on an ever-widening selection of themes. He poked exasperated fun at the family car, he wrote with hesitant admiration about low riders, and he reflected on his lived experiences. He had become a writer with things to say. He had found his voice.

Marco

I couldn't help but be a bit impressed by Marco as he swaggered into the room long after the first bell on the first day of school. He cast a calculating glance around the room, mumbling just loudly enough to divert his classmates' eyes from me, without overtly calling their attention. He installed himself casually in the front of the room, slinging himself into his chair and twisting his baseball cap around backwards with the duckbill over the nape of his neck. I truly had to admire the way he carved out a niche for himself in the
classroom hierarchy without saying a word, and never openly defying my authority. I gradually learned that his reaction to the threat of authority—a knee-jerk response of defiance—had little to do with those of us in perceived authority positions. My desire to avoid forcing him into his one learned response propelled me to give him every ‘benefit of the doubt’. This choice baffled and irritated my colleagues, who felt I was excessively naïve in my assessment of his behaviors, and this in turn made it difficult to brainstorm with them ways of addressing his social and academic needs in the classroom.

Marco was pretty sure he was a bad student. Even that first week of school he shared that he would probably not pass third grade. And, indeed, his academic skills were poor. His spent a lot of time during the first few weeks of school avoiding writing, reading... anything that looked like schoolwork. He was, however, an intensely social child, determined to be somebody in the classroom, so he put his enormous charm to work distracting his classmates, creating exaggeratedly poor products, and engaging his friends by disparaging the value of his own work, and by association, the task itself. This attitude and incumbent behavior so infected the group process that I ended up isolating him from his peers in a work carrel at the front of the room.

As the rest of his peers became accustomed to my emphasis on collaborative projects, Marco’s isolation at the carrel became more profound. His classmates resisted being drawn into off-task interactions with him. He simply could not compete with poster-painting murals, dioramas of cliff
dwellings, and masks of mythical creatures from literature studies. Yet, however I restructured groups to allow Marco to participate in the projects, he could not manage to contribute positively, and I ended up, inevitably, sending him back to his carrel to work alone. In retrospect I realized that he felt the tasks were beyond his abilities. He didn’t believe he could write well enough to help record information and write reports about the people depicted in our murals. He didn’t believe he could read well enough to help locate resources and research the Anasazi. He didn’t believe he had anything to say to further the literature-based projects, so he fell back on what he believed to be his strengths, and tried to entertain.
Section One

Overview of Section One

Although Marco characterized himself as a non-writer, his early attempts demonstrated a good awareness of composing strategies. His approach to transcribing employed both sight words and creative spellings and he reread his written texts with relative ease. However, he had little sense of any purpose for writing, beyond complying with teacher-direction. Marco welcomed the opportunity to write with others simply for companionship, rather than to facilitate the creation of texts. This was made apparent by his choice of writing partner, whose own limited literacy skills and lack of confidence as a writer did little to facilitate the writing process. Eventually Marco was drawn into productive writing with peers due to a shared enthusiasm for the San Francisco Forty-Niners and the chance to create a reaction in classroom fans of the opposing team. However, this new-found purpose could not stand up to the disruption of Writer’s Workshop due to mandatory assessment testing, and when other factors conspired to undermine Marco’s confidence as a writer, he retreated to composing alone.

Beginning Writer’s Workshop

As time passed writer’s workshop became for this group (as it has for every third grade I have taught) a highly motivating and productive time in which students experienced almost total autonomy of their own process. I mentioned that in other years students had enjoyed writing together, and provided a brief overview of the steps of
process writing. However, aside from the instruction that the task was to involve writing, and that there would be daily opportunities to share their texts, I provided no other directive. Here, unlike the content-area inspired projects, the writing was an end in and of itself. The writing didn’t have to follow any specific form, there was no expectation of content, and everyone listened to all the readers as they shared their texts at the end of each daily writing period. Marco, suffering from lack of interaction with his peers, was clearly propelled by the need to belong to the community, and began to write.

**Trying on Writing Strategies for Size**

Marco’s first text was in response to the prompt I gave students during the first few days of school, to describe a peer in the classroom so that the rest of us would be able to guess who it was. This prompt typically served to provide me with an early writing sample, perhaps an insight into the classroom dynamic (as students often described the classmates most important to them), as well as an opportunity for all of us to interact as a group in guessing.

Several students voiced concerns about spelling. I assured them that I was good at reading kids’ writing, and that I was really interested in their descriptions, not spelling. This assurance was enough for most of the students to begin to comply with my request. Marco remonstrated that he could not spell, and therefore could not write. I ignored him. He began by copying the prompt off the board. He sat for several minutes considering this text, and then added the date. He discovered a list of color words on a bulletin board for organizing group work and copied two of them down in a list on the side of his paper,
adding two other words in his own spellings. He copied the word ‘blue’ onto his paper and then caught my arm and implored me to tell him how to write ‘black’.

Over the next few minutes, exhorting him that it was not important to me, but noting that he was unable to continue, I gave him the spellings for brown, black, shoes, and hair. His short text relied heavily on those spellings:

8-14-96
In your journal
Blue and wite and black he is
He has blue sorts. Wite soxs
Brown eyes he is tall brown hair
and black shoes.
1 yello
6 red
2 green
4 wite

(8-14-96
In your journal
Blue and white and black. He is He has blue shorts, white socks, brown eyes. He is tall. Brown hair and black shoes. 1 yellow 6 red 2 green 4 white

To Marco’s obvious delight, his short and labored text was sufficient enough for his classmates to correctly guess the student he had described. He read and reread his text over to himself.

Collaborating with a Novice Partner

Marco now voiced a strong desire to work with his peers during writer’s workshop, and I invited him to join them. However, his selection of writing partner did not do much to further his writing. He chose to write with Tavo, whose skill at writing was even more limited than his own. The lack of confidence both boys shared as writers prevented them from much constructive effort and they spent several days messing around
with clip art on the computers. As the novelty of this activity wore off, Marco began to disrupt his classmates, and as their complaints escalated, I put Marco back in the carrel to work alone. He reacted to this move by refusing to write anything at all. However, the opportunity to read the written texts to the class after each writer's workshop created a powerful draw, and within a couple of days Marco shared the following text.

8-26-96
My famoly
My mom is nice. Yesterday my broter brocook a wendo the perent got Mad so she told My mom se (changed to said) sle pay for the wedo My Mom said theat

(My family. My mom is nice. Yesterday my brother broke a window. The parent got mad so she told my mom. She said she'll pay for the window. My mom said that.)

A classmate had given Marco the spelling of 'said', and this encouraged Marco to see his peers as resources. However, he again returned unsuccessfully to work with Tavo, trying to write a text about Khrystle, whom all the boys admired. However, Khrystle made it clear that she did not like this attention and insisted that the boys abandon the story. Before they had the opportunity to collaborate further, Tavo moved away.

At the beginning of September Tavo, who had been caught in a custody battle was, to his benefit, permanently placed with his grandmother. This placement moved him out of Palo Verde School's attendance area, and he was enrolled in a different elementary school. This move saddened all of us. Tavo's resilient spirit and determination to find the humor in life, coupled with a lack of confidence in his abilities had endeared him to everyone. I was doubly discouraged, not only because I feared that a special education placement would only serve to convince Tavo that the deficit was within him, but also
because I had hoped to focus on Marco and Tavo. However, if I was discouraged, Marco was devastated. No matter that the collaboration had not appeared to me to be particularly productive, he had lost his writing partner. For most of September he spent writer's workshop alternately irritating his classmates and creating illustrations. He participated somewhat wistfully as spectator during the daily author's shares, but did not write anything to share.

From Shared Interests to Writing Partnerships: 49ers Fans Unite

By early October the football season and upcoming games dominated conversations, primarily among the boys. Marco began to participate enthusiastically in the conversations, but struggled alone when the others inevitably returned to the tables to write. Two factors contributed to Marco's loner status at this time. One, while he had been establishing a writing relationship with Tavo, other similar collaborating pairs had been established and now Marco was odd-man out. Additionally, Marco was a Dallas Cowboys fan in a 49er's world. No one would collaborate on a piece extolling the virtues of the Cowboys. Marco began to watch another collaborating pair, Eric and Ralph, and had begun to join them on the foldout couch during writing time. They were engaged in writing a version of the three little pigs, and could not be distracted from that task, and, they stated loudly, they were 49er's fans. Marco, nonetheless, began to write again, on a solitary theme, while seated on a corner of the couch next to Eric and Ralph. Although the text did not grow beyond a few words, it represented a turning point for
Marco who observed how Ralph and Eric helped each other by collaborating on ideas as well as helping each other spell.

**MARCO/NFL FOOTBALL**
I went to the NFL I am on

The following week Marco actively searched for a writing partner. He finally found Chico, who was also a 49er’s fan, and together they extended Marco’s text. Now both collaborating teams of boys sat on the couch during writer’s workshop, leaning on whiteboards, and trading ideas. Ralph was their resource of choice for spellings, and both Marco and Chico relied heavily on him.

At the next author’s share Marco and Chico read chorally their text.

*I went to the NFL I am on the Dallas Cowboys team. It’s the Best team I played for now it’s Time for the big game Dallas .v.s. Raiders in the 4th Qorter Dallas were Lozen. And then Dallas cath up Then Dallas Cowboys won.*

Dallas is the Best **&&!!**

(I went to the NFL I am on the Dallas Cowboys Team. It’s the best team I played for. Now it’s time for the big game, Dallas vs. Raiders. In the 4th quarter Dallas were loosing and then Dallas caught up. Then [the] Dallas Cowboys won.)

**Outside Interference on Writing Process**

In mid October standardized testing completely interrupted writer’s workshop for an entire week. Students curiously read the biographical data printed on the back of their answer sheets and discovered that Marco was the oldest student in the class. This was a bittersweet distinction for Marco, because while being the oldest afforded him some status, the cause of his age, having been retained in second grade, also marked him as a failure. He talked about this with me, wanting to believe as I believe, that the retention
said more about his second-grade classroom than about him. The combination of Marco’s preoccupation with his past retention as well as the break in the habit of daily writing disrupted the fledgling collaboration between him and Chico. He wrote alone, consulting only occasionally with me over spellings.

By Marco
Once upon a time there was a man named Marco. He was in 3rd grade. He flunked 20 times. He is 30 years old, he was poor. He was poor because he spent all his money on an expensive house.

(By Marco
Once there was a man named Marco. He was in 3rd grade. He flunked 20 times. He is 30 years old, he was poor. He was poor because he spent all his money on an expensive house.)

Section Two

Overview of Section Two

Marco tried unsuccessfully to find a writing partner. His previously successful strategy of connecting over a shared interest fell on deaf ears. He finally gravitated to a group of three boys who were actively collaborating on a version of The Three Little Pigs. When he could not gain entrée into their project, he participated by creating his own parallel text. As his proficiency as a writer improved, he became increasingly invested in the notion of authorship. This made collaboration problematic as he and his collaborators struggled of the issue of ownership. Marco discovered that claiming sole authorship of a text resulted in being left alone.

He actively sought out MJ to work on a common theme, and MJ’s proficiency as a writer had a positive developmental impact on Marco’s next text. Under MJ’s wing,
Marco incorporated information gleaned in library research into his own text. He also demonstrated for the first time a new purpose for print as he modified his own preferences (at least in print) to create an alliance with his writing partner.

Collaborating through Shared Activity: Writing Side-By Side

When Marco was ready the following week to share the piece he tried to reconnect with Chico to begin a new piece of writing. However, he discovered that while he, Marco, had been working on the 30 year old third grader piece, Chico had found a new writing partner. He was now writing with Lisa, and was busy writing his own version of the three little pigs. Marco then tried to interest Eric and Ralph in a collaborative piece on the NFL, but they refused. They were, they reminded him, 49er's fans. Marco gave up trying to find takers for the NFL theme, and settled with Ralph and Eric and now Chico, on the couch and settled down to create his own version of the three little pigs. He made few requests of Ralph regarding spellings, and kept the text partially hidden as he composed. He could hardly wait to share the story.

11-1-96
the three little dogs
by Marco

the first little dog made a dog house with bones.
The big bad Bull dog eat the dog.
The second little dog made a home of Dallas cowboys
The next day the bull dog went to the house.
He we up to the house and he plow the house down.
The 3ed little dog made his house of 40-winners helmets.
And the next day the big bulldog eet the dog up
And tate the end of the tree little dog's

(The Three Little Dogs
By Marco
The first little dog made a house with bones.)
The big bad bulldog ate the dog.
The second little dog made a home of Dallas helmets.
The next day the bulldog went to the house. He went up to the house and he blew the house
down.
The 3rd little dog made his house of 40-whiners helmets.
And the next day the big bulldog ate the dog up.
And that [was] the end of the three little dogs.

This piece represented a triumph for Marco who had accomplished so many
goals with the same piece. He had found a way to participate in the micro-
community shared by Eric and Ralph. He participated as a collaborator both in
the shared genre, as well as in the interaction with Ralph as a resource. And,
he managed to tweak his new found peers by including the characterization of
the forty-whiners in his text. This particular piece was enormously well
received by all at the author’s share.

Appropriating Peer Process

Marco now commented on how much he liked working with other people. He
listened in a few days later when I did an informal interview with Eric and Ralph on the
ways that they collaborated in a writing partnership. Marco was particularly intrigued
with their method of taking turns to create a text, alternating between having artistic
control, and copying the other partner’s section in order to create identical copies of the
collaborative piece. Marco returned to his 30 year-old third grader piece and recopied his
original text in order to make a copy for both himself and for Chico, making a few
inaccurate spelling changes and adding Chico as co-author.
The Trouble of Co-authorship: Issues of Ownership

This piece was also much appreciated by his classmates who greeted his reading with laughter, and much discussion of what a 30 year old third grader might look like. Marco struggled with the gift of shared authorship he had conferred on Chico. He didn't want to share the acclaim he received for the piece with Chico, who, he pointed out at the author's share, had actually had no part in the creation of the piece. He legitimized his claim to sole authorship by adding substantially to the original text, (although with little concern over developing the content) rewriting the entire story, and removing Chico's name as co-author.

By Marco

Once upon a time there was a man named Marco he was in 3rd grade he flunked 20 time. He us 30 years old he was pore. He was pore because he spend all hes Moiney on a ecspcevi hose. He was happy because he was pore he neve have no money to spend because he didn't wont to spened money because he liket to slep.

(By Marco

Once there was a man named Marco. He was in 3rd grade. He flunked 20 times. He i 30 years old, he was poor. He was poor because he spent all his money on an expensive house. He wa happy because he was poor. He never had any money to spend because he didn't want to spend money because he liked to sleep)

Common Interests Re-surface as a Catalyst for Collaboration

Marco found himself again without a partner after removing Chico as co-author on the 30-year-old-third-grader story, and Ralph and Eric continued to write paired pieces. Marco also began to compose alone and wrote the following text about himself and his brother going to the high school football game. He folded the paper into an envelope shape and carefully decorated the flaps with Go Blue Devils.
Me and MY brother
My brother and we like to go to every (every) game of the Sunnyside Blue Devils with them. We like varsicide (varsity) the best because they are the best of the best football.

Me and My Brother
My brother and [I] we like to go to every game of the Sunnyside Blue Devils with them. We like varsity because they are the best of the best football (players)

In the meantime, Chico had become fascinated with Ralph’s and Eric’s partnership and defected from the Dallas Cowboys camp. In a seemingly deliberate snub to Marco, he began to modify the text of his story-in-progress to include pro forty-niners sentiments. With Chico clearly otherwise engaged, Marco again looked for a new partnership and had a long conversation with MJ about football. MJ was the classroom authority on the actual point spreads of the various games being played that season. MJ and Marco asked to go to the library to look up statistics on the performance of the Dallas Cowboys and the 49er’s in previous years. They returned with several books that contained lists of the NFL teams and pictures of the team logos. These books provided the catalyst for a long period of collaboration among Marco, MJ, and a third classmate, Mario. Over the next few weeks they created many pages of illustrations showing the name of the team and accompanying logo. They discovered the image of football player in the computer clip art and made stacks of Popsicle-stick puppets, all colored appropriately to represent the teams currently competing in the play-offs. They created other props --goal posts, confetti-- and put on a skit for their classmates. Marco eventually wrote the following text:
Marco M.
The 49er and Cowboy's Game
The 49ers played against the cowboys last week the cowboys won. It was 20 to 17. But last year 49ers beat the cowboys two times last year. Since 1993 the 49ers won the cowboys.

(Marco M.
The 49ers and [the] Cowboy's Game
The 49ers played against the Cowboys last week. The Cowboys won. It was 20 to 17. But last year [the] 49ers beat the Cowboys, two times last year. Since 1993 the 49ers won the Cowboys)

Peer Influences on Topic Selection and Content

This text illustrated Marco's developing purposes for print. He still carefully labeled every piece with his name --after the experience with Chico, he carefully guarded his authorship. However, the statistical information he had found in the library now found its way into his text, in this first instance of the interaction with a library text impacting his writing. And, he used print to acknowledge the perspective of his classmate, MJ. MJ refused to enter into the partisan battles regarding loyalty to the competing teams, and often commented that all the teams and players were equally skilled. The last lines of Marco's text were a gesture of solidarity to his partner, of non-partisanship. While Marco clearly maintained a powerful loyalty to his favorite team, he could, in print, present an alternative perspective in order to build community with his peers.

In his characteristic fashion, once Marco had exhausted the possibilities for a topic, he began immediately to look for another peer writing project. He would have liked to continue working with MJ. However, MJ had became
completely absorbed in creating a biography of Michael Jordan's sports accomplishment and retreated from peer collaborations. A pet rat name Chiquita joined us as classroom mascot, and Marco joined in the conversations about pets that her presence prompted. He told about his iguana in great detail, and drew an elaborate illustration, but the text he eventually wrote was very short.

My Iguana
My iguana's tail is longer than Chiquita's

The conversations about pets continued for the next writing session. Tenaya told a made-up story about having three rottweilers which prompted Marco to tell us all about his dog. He then settled down to re-title and rewrite the short text of the day before. He struggled with transcribing although he asked me only for the spelling of 'shepherd'.

My pets
My pet snake's tail is longer than Chiquita's tail. My first dog was a German Shepherd and the next pet was a snake and every time I go up to the cage he would rattle. And then I got a shepherd. He is very playful. He bites, not that hard.

Section Three

Overview of Section Three

A home visit with Marco's mother became a turning point for all of us.
As Marco’s classroom behavior deteriorated I was torn between accepting the seeming inevitability of his failure, and doing whatever it took to help him NOT fulfill the negative prophesies I had heard about him from the moment he walked into our classroom. Meeting his mother gave me the opportunity to collaborate with her in creating other possibilities for her son. She spoke clearly about the struggle he faced as a dark-skinned English-speaking Mexican American, and acted to find him a way to connect positively with his cultural heritage through participating in Mexican dance troupe. The mentorship he experienced as a result of his interactions with the young men of the troupe opened a door to possible worlds that he wrote about and shared at school. Once he had connected home and school through writing, began to write more reflectively, and to bring themes from home and the street to share with his peers.

**Connecting Home and School: Parent and Teacher as Collaborators**

Just after Thanksgiving break Marco had a series of fighting incidents with other students and seemed to be forever punished at the front office. One day he was seen by the nurse taking a second unauthorized dose from his asthma inhaler and she sent a letter home describing him as abusing drugs in the playground. I had been concerned since the beginning of the year that Marco was easily targeted by the staff as a troublemaker, and that his response to being so labeled was to make it doubly true. Yet, he had come so far in social and academic development within our classroom and I was anxious that
the experience of being a successful student was too new to withstand much familiar negative typing. I also hoped to mediate the nurse’s characterization of his inhaler use. That afternoon I took advantage of his having missed the bus to give him a ride home.

He called out to his neighbors as we pulled up to the gray apartments that fronted busy two-lane traffic. Animatedly he showed me where the stucco had been chipped away by cops digging out the slugs from last week’s drive-by. When we entered the apartment his mother was seated on the couch, balancing her dinner on her lap, getting ready to leave for work. She greeted my unannounced visit with great hospitality of spirit. She carefully listened to my concerns about Marco’s fragile status as a successful student, choosing to trust me as an advocate for her child. Marco watched me anxiously, waiting for me to ‘bust him’. And perhaps I did, a little, in contrasting his current successes to his past failures. His mother expressed her fears for Marco as a child of color, of Mexican heritage, non-Spanish speaking, with little or no cultural and linguistic ties to counterbalance the race-bias he experienced. When I left that afternoon I was no longer just Marco’s teacher, but a link of trust between his home and his school. In spite of her exhausting shift-work schedule, over the course of the remaining school year Marco’s mother found time to attend our classroom Author’s Teas, the third-grade opera performance of “The Three Javelinas”, and parent teacher conferences. Marco frequently referred to my visits, retelling a detail, or commenting to his classmates that
he’d better behave or Mrs. Israel would definitely tell his mom.

In later conversations, Marco’s mother told me that she had found a way for him to connect with his cultural heritage, enrolling him in Baile Folklorico.

**Connecting Home to School through Writing**

A week or so later Marco shared a story about his anticipated trip to the Mexico border town of Nogales.

This weekend I am going to Nogales and buy boots and maybe black pants and white cowboy shirt and I will look around the store and maybe buy something else and maybe a remote control car and maybe a cowboy hat and a bike. Last time I went over I went to a famous Restaurant I ate a juicy taco and two egg rolls and a bean burrito and ice cream and jello. I had a stomach ache and I went home.

This piece was greeted with tremendous interest by his peers. He had miscued on ‘bike’, reading ‘pink bike’ and they teased him unmercifully over having a pink bike. As they questioned him, Marco shared that his mom had signed him up to join a dance troupe that performed with a Mexican band called Mercedes. The boots and pants and shirt of his story were for his dance costume. Over the next several weeks he brought in cassettes and frequently danced for his classmates. As his confidence as a performer increased, he would occasionally show us the steps he was currently learning, laughing at his own mistakes. He met a girl at one of their gigs, and created a story about
My girlfriend
My girlfriend she is not conceited for Christmas she gave me 100 dollars and a Dallas Cowboys watch and it had E. Smith ticking around the clock and in the center it had a Dallas Cowboys star. And a kiss. And a 14K chain that had my name.

The written accounts of his experiences with the dance troupe marked a significant change in Marco’s status. With obvious pride, he took every possible opportunity to show what he alone among his classmates knew about Mexican heritage, both by performing for us, and writing about the band. He seemed to have found another niche for himself, and his confrontative behaviors of the last few months faded away. He found himself more accepted by his peers now that he wasn’t always on the verge of a conflict with them, and this led to more flexible collaborations. Additionally, his classmates noted that he used difficult words in his texts, that he was not prevented by fears about spelling from writing what he wanted to say. This also marked a distinct departure from his earliest writing in which he had announced that as he couldn’t spell, he couldn’t and wouldn’t write. Although his spellings were actually usually pretty non-standard, his ability to read what he had written made that insignificant to his peers, who began to view him as an expert.
Section Four

Overview of Section Four

Marco and his collaborators struggled to resolve the problem of multiple authors and a single text. As they began to use the classroom computers for composing, they discovered the strategy of printing multiple copies. This allowed each of the collaborators to have a hard copy in hand, and assured more equal weight at the daily author's share. Marco was able to resolve the issues of authorship that had plagued his relationship with Chico, and they eventually created a shared text and a by-line. As Marco became an increasingly fluent writer, he was able to participate in multiple opportunities for collaboration with an ever-changing configuration of writing partners, and an equally diverse pool of themes. His investment in writing surpassed the simple preference for companionship, and he began to reject collaborations that were not productive. He also assumed a more directorial role with his peers, insisting on being heard and having a say. If his peers refused to capitulate, he withdrew quietly and non-reactively to compose elsewhere, thus simultaneously maintaining his social place in the room as well as creative control over his texts.

On the final days of the year, Marco divided his time between revising and adding to earlier texts, and writing reflective personal narratives.

Group Collaboration: Multiple Writers Single Texts

Marco returned to write with Ralph, and the two were joined by Rico
and Sergio. For the entire month of January they wrote together on the folded out couch. They consulted with MJ and checked out books from the library to develop their texts, which dealt exclusively with football. They composed noisily, with Ralph and Marco taking turns as scribes, Rico frequently copying the text to create multiple copies, and Sergio suggesting ideas and making illustrations. Toward the end of the month Sergio’s time with the LD specialist was rescheduled during our writing time and he was forced to drop out as a writing partner. Left without their illustrator, Marco, Ralph and Rico rediscovered the computer and used the clip art to illustrate their texts. They also began to print out multiple copies. Once Rico was assured of a copy to read in choral performances, he dropped out of the writing group and Marco and Ralph continued as a pair. They wrote a series of almost identical texts over the following weeks, changing only the names of the various competing teams. Part of their delight in this theme came from the insider lingo: hoovers. I had shared with them that my sister was horrified that I let my own children say ‘that sucks’, and had suggested I institute ‘that hoovers’ instead. This became the favorite classroom epithet, and part of the shared experience that forged our identity as a classroom.

The big game against 40 whiners and Dallas Cowboys. The 40 whiners are hoovers and the Dallas Cowboys are #1 and the 40 whiners #0 and the scoreboard was 10,000 to 0 and the 40 whiners started to cry the Dallas Cowboys said they are hoovers.

The big game against [the] 40 whiners and [the] Dallas Cowboys. The 40 whiners are hoovers and the Dallas Cowboys are #1 and the 40 Whiners #0. And the score board was 10,000 to 0 and the 40 Whiners started to cry and the Dallas Cowboys said they are hoovers.
Marco grew tired of collaborating with Ralph, who, once Rico had defected, tended to try to take control of the stories. He wrote two more football pieces with Chico. Both boys were active in both writing and creating the piece and for the first time in months, Marco included Chico as co-author on his copy of the text.

1) **By Marco M. & Chico A,**
The NFL super bowl green bay agenst NeP I am going for green Bay for the super bowl because they are the boom and NeP are hoovers and green bay kicked but and the Patres kiss green bays but.

(The NFL Superbowl. Green Bay against New England Patriots (NEP) I am going for Green Bay for the Superbowl because they are the bomb and the NEP are hoovers and Green Bay kicked butt and the Patriots kiss Green Bay's butt)

2) **Today is the big game against the gb and cp** the gb kicked off to cp and the cp cached the football and ran to the touchdown and they had a kick off then the gb ran to the touchdown the score bord was 35-14 the end of the game

(Today is the big game against the the Green Bay (GB) and Carolina Panthers (CP) The GB kicked off to CP and the CP caught the football and ran to the touchdown and they had a kick-off. Then the GB ran to the touchdown. The scoreboard was 35-14. The end of the game)

By the end of the month Marco began again to collaborate with Rico and Ralph on a new theme, low-rider cars. It became obvious that as his confidence as a writer/author increased, so did his ability to interact positively with his peers. As his peers came to view him as an expert writer, they also deferred to him on other matters. In the following conversation, Marco resisted the bid to build community with Ralph at Rico's expense, and chose as well to include Jay positively in the group. This was a remarkable and compassionate choice, because Jay spent much of his instructional day in special needs
programs, and had little opportunity to participate as a community member in the classroom.

Ralph: (looking at Rico and Marco drawing)
Hey, Marco’s drawing is better than yours!
(Rico snatched his paper away. Marco put his hand on Ralph’s paper, patting it, cautioning him to stop).
Ralph: Well, Jay’s is better than yours, and he’s faster too.
Marco: Yeah, well Jay’s drawing is good, too. (including Rico’s in the ‘too’)
Rico: (smiling at Marco) Hey. Look at Jay’s, BAAAADD.

Marco and Ralph spent the next couple of days experimenting with content changes, first adding-in and then independently editing-out details of guns and violent crime. By this time they had discovered that writing all in capital letters avoided the problem of when to capitalize and when not. While Marco appreciated this as a solution, he commented that the text looked ugly.

In his subsequent texts he avoided all caps.

LOW RIDERS
LOW RIDERS ARE EXCELENTE MAN. AND THEY HOPE AND THEY ARE THE BOMB. AND THEY DO THREE WHEEL MOTION. AND THE HOMEBOYS LIKE TO PICK UP GIRLS IN THERE LOW RIDERS. THEY COULD CROSS THE BORDER. THEY DO DRIVE BYE’S.

(Low Riders
Low Riders are excelente man. And they hop and they are the bomb. And they do three-wheel-motion. And the homeboys like to pick up girls in their low riders. They could cross the border. They do drive-by’s.)

Writing Alone for Creative Control

Although he liked the story, Marco was not pleased with the form of his collaborative text with Ralph, and so he wrote another low-rider story on
his own, this time with the pages carefully bound into a book with an oak-tag cover.

**BY: MARCO**

*Low Riders!*

They hoop all day tonight.

My cousin has a Low Rider.

He hoop all the time on Friday.

He don’t sowe off like other people.

He sheid he will give me the car.

(By: Marco

Low Riders!

They hop all day [and] night

My cousin has a low rider

He hops all the time on Friday

He don’t show off like other people.

He said he will give me the car.)

**Putting It All Together: Conversation, Collaboration, Composition**

In late spring an early heat wave opened up the local pool, and everyone was talking about the unusual circumstance. Marco, Ralph, Rico and Sergio were clustered around a single computer, taking turns at the keyboard to type in sentences one by one. The three other classroom computers were available for use, but they were clearly choosing to work together. Quickly, however, Marco became exasperated at the random nature of their joint composition and decided for the group that they should write about swimming. Then, unwilling to share creative control, he took over the theme as a solo project. When he had written the first few lines he printed out the text to review it before deciding what to write next. He talked a lot about what he could write about, with me, with his classmates, adding a word or two in pencil
4-97

I like the Sunny Side Pool because we could swim but we get clorox in our eyes and we get to jump off the diving board and we get to wear life jackets and we pay a quarter to get in Sunnyside Pool me and other peple

Pencilled in at the bottom of the text Marco added: ...’are having fun and swimming a lot’.

The next day he was again joined at the computer by Sergio and Ralph who participated mainly as admirers, and he typed in the pencilled line of the day before. There was lots of discussion and Rico came to ask whether they could say that the girls were FINE. Marco somewhat adversarially announced that he was gonna say it, (ostensibly with or without permission). Before he continued with this piece, however, he was involved in a conflict with a student in the neighboring third-grade class. He spontaneously wrote the following letter, printing out a copy for both the student and principal.

Marco M.
Dear, Mr Smith
I go kiked (kicked) out of Mrs. Winters room because I hit Winters stoudent (student). And I am sory (sorry) Hary (Harry) and you Mrs. (Mr.) Smith
Love,
Marco Martinez

He then returned to his swimming story, made a few editing changes, and added the text about the “fine” girls.

I like the Sunny Side Pool because we could swim but we get clorox in our eyes and we get to jump off the diving board and we get to
were (wear) like (life) jackets and we pay a quarter to get in Sunnyside Pool me and other people have fun and we get to go to the bathroom and take a shower and you can't wear flotes (floats) and it is the BOMB and the girls are fine

The same day Marco started another piece about his experiences with the band. After a few minutes he came over and stood behind me, watching me take field-notes, his paper clutched in his fist.

Marco: I don't know any Spanish. (sigh)
Israel: Well, what do you want to say?
Marco: Quebradita
Israel: Oh, you mean you don't know how to spell it. Because you speak it fine. (I give him the spelling)
Marco: I don't know how to speak it that much.

Marco returned to write the quebradita piece, commenting as he prepared to share it that he needed to write more, more details, and more of the continuing story.

By Marco
Marco Banda Mercedes
Tomrow I am go to Phoenix to dance quebradita and I went to 3 dance and this is gona be my 4th dance I am going to swim wih the band and we are going to a wonderful resteront. Iam going to have a good time. They are good stars to me.

Marco never got back to adding to this piece, perhaps in part because Ralph and Rico really pestered him to continue with them on his Sunnyside Pool story. They thoroughly enjoyed themselves with this rewrite, making lightening fast changes and suggestions that never made it to the page. The final version developed in two steps in which Marco included both Rico and Ralph as protagonists in the story:
I like the Sunny Side Pool because we could swim but we get chlorox in are eyes and we get to jump off the diving board and we get to were like jackets and we pay a quarter to get in Sunnyside Pool me and other people have fun and we get to go to the bathroom and take a shower and you can’t wear flotes and it is the BOMB and the girls are fine...and the life guard saved Rico and the fine girls kissed Rico and the fine girls kissed Ralph

The final version included Marco as well

...and they kissed Marco too.

When Marco put the text into his writing folder (typically a sign that he was done with the piece) he had scratched “they kissed” and simply written “...and Marco too.”

Revisiting Old Themes

A few weeks before the end of school, Marco wrote his last football story with Ralph and Rico. Sergio had been a previous writing partner for this theme, but his LD resource pull-out schedule prevented him from participating at all in writer’s workshop. In his absence, Ralph and Rico switched their loyalties to the Dallas Cowboys, (and to Marco), identifying Sergio as odd-man-out-49er-fan in the text.

4-18-97


Marco announced that he was no longer at all interested in this theme, although he had enjoyed writing with his partners. He returned to the story of
buying his dance costume in Nogales, creating a bound book. He carefully
went through the original text determining what illustrations he needed to draw
for the pages of text. At author's share he held up the pictures for his
classmates to see while he read the appropriate text from his original
manuscript. He also returned to his earlier Low Rider text and added
significantly more detail. The original text had read:

LOW RIDERS
LOW RIDERS ARE EXCELENTES MAN. AND THEY HOPE AND
THEM THEY ARE THE BOMB. AND THEY DO THREE WHEEL
MOTION. AND THE HOMEBOYS LIKE TO PICK UP GIRLS IN
THEM LOW RIDERS. THEY COULD CROSS THE BORDER.
THEM THEY DO DRIVE BYE'S .

He now added:

THEY DO DRUGS AND THEY HOPE ALL DAY AND THERE
DRUG DILLERS
THAT'S WHY THEY MAKE A LOT OF MONEY AND GET
THOSE LOW RIDERS
LOW RIDERS ARE #1

The last two weeks of school were a bedlam of activities and special
opportunities. In spite of endless interruptions, Marco wrote and shared two
last pieces. He talked with me about the first one, ruefully acknowledging his
frustration at not having a dependable family car.

Final Days: A Return to Personal Narrative

5-7-97
By Marco M.
My Car!
My mom drives slow.
We got our Honda.
We call the car the love bout (boat).
We work on the car.
But it just don't want (want) to work.
We stall on the freeway.
We went to eat good food like calnesata (carne asada) and Brrito and tocos
and a Pepsi
The carberater Just Don't Work
I hat (hate) that car so much.
We pot (put) lots of money in Gas

I never got to talk with Marco about his last writing of the year. I found it tucked into his writing folder after the last day of school. It described the third-grade field trip to the Southside Convention Center, where we were treated to a special performance by the Southside Symphony Orchestra.

Marco was particularly thrilled by the performances of the young people, as well as the experience of seeing his own music teacher perform as a professional musician; wearing a tuxedo, no less. That excitement, and a touch of wistfulness echo in his text.

5-9-97
By Marco Martinez
Dr. Ricks at the c.c.c. southside symphesra Orchestra
Dr. Rick was playing the clarinet.
It was funny wen (when) the 15teen year old kid song (sang).
I wish I was one of them.
It was very cool with a Big C.
This kids were looking at me and I said what (What?).
They were in 4th grade there was lots of people.
Dr. Rick was playing good!
Dr. Rick was wering (wearing) the same thing like yesterday.

Reflections on Marco

Marco came into third grade already convinced that school was not for him. The certain amount of academic skill he had achieved masked the
disconnected-ness he felt. It was easy to assume that he was rejecting school, rather than experiencing the school rejecting him. With his blustering behaviors and penchant for whole class disruption, I also struggled with Marco as a student. However, to me his earliest pleas for help spoke to his fears and vulnerability, rather than his skill at manipulation.

Marco was able to get the words written down on the page, and this ability, coupled with the opportunity to share, provided enough early motivation for him to persevere in Writer’s Workshop. He was invested in connecting with peers, rather than the story to tell. The affective aspect of the collaborative experiences with peers he had in Writer’s Workshop carried over into his other classroom interactions. Sharing his writing opened the way for sharing who he was, and he began to feel at home in the classroom.

His participation in Baile Folklorico and the Banda Mercedes provided a significant opportunity for him to discover who he might be, to consider ‘possible lives’. His growing pride in his Mexican heritage was demonstrated by his impromptu dance performances for class, his desire to speak Spanish, and in the stories he began to tell.

Marco evolved dramatically from child with arms folded across his chest, to a child with arms outstretched. The relationship of trust he shared with me and his classmates provided him with a safety net to as he began to abandon his previous confrontative persona. However, if challenged he often reverted quickly to defiance, and the situation, however mildly begun, could
quickly escalate. I observed how easily he triggered those who didn’t KNOW him, engendering reactions more suited to a gangbanger than an eight-year-old boy. As I read the last piece in his writing folder, I was touched by how openly he confided his dream:

Dr. Mike is at the CCC Symphony Orchestra
Dr. Mike was playing the clarinet.
It was funny when the fifteen-year-old kid sang.
I wish I was one of them

I hoped that he would be able to keep that dream of a possible life alive in the coming school years.
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

In the following discussion I will be addressing the notion of writing instruction as a liberatory literacy practice. I will present examples of student interactions in peer collaborations, both positive and problematic. I will highlight the interplay of social relationships as they shape writing process and the facilitating interactions that characterized student-created zones of proximal development. I will discuss the barriers of institutionalized individualism (Salazar 1997) and decontextualized Discourse (Gee 1989, 1991, 1995, 1996) that characterize mainstream schooling and disadvantage minority language and culture children. I will blend the theoretical and empirical evidence to present Writer's Workshop as a location of liberatory literacy education. Lastly, I will revisit the considerations of race addressed in Chapter Two.

Creating a Liberatory Balance of Freedom and Authority

With the current reexamination of literacy education in recent research, the notion of locating writing instruction in a progressive-post progressive continuum has become timely. As other researchers review earlier investigations of writing (Graves 1994, Newkirk 1994, Atwell 1998), I am mindful of Dyson’s (1993) admonition that polarized arguments create a dichotomy of either-or that neither accurately describes nor aids in the understanding of the issue. I am not arguing for a progressive ‘just let them write’ curriculum, and the negation of a post progressive ‘teaching-writing’ curriculum, but rather seeking to understand how these instructional perspectives function to empower or disempower my students.

In his discussion of empowerment Ruiz (1997) writes, ‘Teachers do not empower or disempower anyone, nor do schools. They merely create the
conditions under which people can empower themselves, or not.” (p. 323)

The three students of my study had not experienced school writing as creative or empowering. All three referred to writing as hard and boring, and all three had limited mastery of basic literacy skills. None of the children had any sense of personal purpose for print, no reason “why”. For Rico and Marco, school writing had consisted of using print for the purpose of displaying content area knowledge, largely by filling in the blanks. For Tenaya, whose BVE dialect was not recognized as a language variety by the school, school writing had been reduced to crafting essentially meaningless sentences with one syllable word cards and copying them onto lined paper (Gee 1996, Michaels 1981). No wonder they had concluded that writing was not for them.

When I directed my students to write any way they wanted, about anything they wanted, with anyone they wanted, they did not wildly embrace the idea, to say the least. They had no idea what writing without teacher-directed parameters might be, and how to begin. They reacted with anxiety, desperately racking their brains to figure out what it was I really wanted. If it was words I was after, that they could provide, scouring the room for environmental print (print that I had provided --school sanctioned print--) that could be parlayed into an acceptable script, a text I might approve. They were suspicious of my unspoken motive, all too sensitized to the ever-present hidden agendas, unwilling to be caught ignorant yet again of the implicit rules of the game. The notion that their stories were the real goal of Writing Workshop was beyond credibility. For Rico and Marco, their lived experiences held no connection to the experiences of school: how could
such disparate worlds coexist? For Tenaya, not only her life but her very language had been deemed deficient, unsatisfactory as a means of expression.

**Supporting Student Voices**

Empowerment is tied to the notion of voice. Of voice, Ruiz (1997) says, 'when sociolinguists carry out their investigations of language use, they ask, “Who says what to whom in what language? When we investigate the issue of voice, we should ask, “Who says?” (p. 321).

My students have taught me that to have a voice is to speak according to self-driven intentions and to know that what they say will be heard and considered, simply because they say. My own recent experience of voicelessness brought my students’ awareness sharply to mind. No matter how clearly I described to the mechanic the errant workings of my car, he repeated frustratedly, ‘if you could just describe what the car is doing when it stalls, we could fix it for you.’ Only when I watched the mechanic nod in obvious comprehension as my husband described the vehicle’s behavior using exactly the same words as I had, did I realize that in that male-dominated context, as a woman with car trouble, I had no voice. In classrooms where the instructional dialogues are typically dominated by the teacher, both in topic selection and discourse style, students have little opportunity to experience voice. You cannot experience voice when engaged in a recitation script, or the three part I-R-E interactions described by Mehan (1992). Neither is it possible to experience voice when the opportunities to speak are always delegated by another. Thus, fostering voice within the authoritative framework of schooling is enormously difficult. The power differential between my students and me is undeniable
by dint of my race, age, education, and institutional position. Yet I cannot equalize our status merely by attempting to abdicate my position—my students will not be automatically elevated by my own self-lowering. I cannot delegate them power merely by choosing to have less. Neither am I advocating for non-directive education, for as Gadotti (1996) discovered, “the educative act cannot do without authority, it is present even if the educator and pupil don’t wish it to be present...Without the dialectics of authority and freedom, there is no education.” (p 75). Rather, I am struggling to find a forum where my students’ voices can share the floor with the mainstream voice that dominates schooling. Therefore, Writer’s Workshop is (initially) an extremely teacher-directed environment, an instructional scenario in which I trust that the impositions of structure will justify the creative means. After all, while I am convinced that writing is a powerful tool for emancipation, these students did not share that conviction. They didn’t write because they wanted to, but because I (and the situation) demanded it.

With these three students, as with every class I have had, the early experiences of Writer’s Workshop were agonizing for me. I worried that the imposed quiet writing periods, the emphasis on production, and the obvious discomfort of my students as they struggled to find something to say, would silence them forever. I began to fear that this time, Writing Workshop would fail to be a liberatory experience. And yet, in spite of my fears, Writing Workshop again functioned to create the conditions under which [my students] empowered themselves.

The evolution of my students’ writing—from their early attempts at teacher-approved writing, to the self-determined texts they wrote by the year’s end--was truly
astonishing. An entire world of experience and possibility came to life between Tenaya’s earliest text:

8-14-96
6. Khrystle is my mpb blDa
7. Khrystle in a bot tran
8. Khrystle LT mn Tran
9. Khrystle bot
10. Jazmetmt

and her last:

The two cats
Once there was two cats name cadles and chocalet chip
And they were playing Barbie’s
And they whent to eat
Then they went to the park to go to slepe

Between Rico’s first text:

Witt surt blu sorrs. Brawn sus blak her
she his a 3 ring binder wit soks sort her wrson hrs

and his last:

ME AND MY DOGS
I LIKE TAKING HIM FOR A WALK BUT I HATE WHEN HE RUNS TO FAST AND HE IS A ROTWILER AND A BANGE DOG AND A POT POMERRANIN AND PORT CEWOWO THE BANGE DIG IS NICE TO KIDS THE CEWOWO BITS AND THE ROTWILER IS NISE BUT KIDS’AR AFRAID OF HEM

Between Marco’s first text:

8-14-96
In your journal

Blue and wite and black he is
He has blue sorts. Wite soxs
Brown eyes he is tall brown hair
and black shoes.
1 yelleo
6 red
and his last:

5-9-97
By Marco Martinez
Dr. Ricks at the c.c.c. southside symphestra Orchestra
Dr. Rick was playing the clarinet.
It was funny when the 15teen year old kid song (sang).
I wish I was one of them.
It was very cool with a Big C.
This kids were looking at me and I said what (What?).
They were in 4th grade there was lots of people.
Dr. Rick was playing good!
Dr. Rick was wearing the same thing like yesterday.

Far more important than the texts themselves were the ways in which my students interacted with me and their peers in the creation of their stories. While I delighted in the obvious acquisition of literacy skills that came about, not as a result of discrete writing lessons, but rather through the practice of telling their stories, that is not the aspect of being and becoming a writer I find exciting. (Although, given the mainstream emphasis on form over content, increased standardization is a fortunate byproduct of developing voice.) Rather, it is the evolution of my students writing for self-directed purpose as reflective social actors that I find so compelling.

A Discourse of Collaboration

As I tuned my ear more sharply to my students’ voices, I became aware that their ways with words were deeply embedded in social practices. In fact, their interactions as collaborators in Writer’s Workshop were part of a developing Discourse of writers that both supported and determined what they, as writers, could do (Gee 1994, 1996). This Discourse was marked by
collaborative activities at odds with the mainstream expectations for writing behaviors—peer collaborations that impacted every student in the class, and provided a forum for developing voice for even the least fluent of writers.

Peer Collaboration

Although Writing Workshop began as a teacher-directed activity, within the framework of restrictions on movement and noise level, the requirement that the activities in which students were engaged be directly related to writing, rare dictatorial lapses on my part regarding topic selection or product length, and occasional ‘nudges’ (Atwell 1987) toward specific literary considerations, my students quickly appropriated the format for their own. They began to participate in collaborative writing activities, or behaviors, that changed the character of the Writing Workshop. My students as writers, rather than their writings, became the focus of their activity, and we became co-members of a Writer’s Workshop.

Over the course of the year, my students wrote for multiple purposes. The following list, while extensive, by no means represents the extent of their intentions. Their texts were as diverse in content and purpose as any random selection of published works. They wrote to create stories specifically for peer admiration, as in Marco’s story about the most popular girl in the school, or simply to be able to interact socially with others, as in Tenaya’s letters to me. They wrote pieces to rib each other as in Marco’s version of the Three Little Pigs (Bulldogs), or to refute peer commentary as in Rico’s story about his long-tailed rottweiler. They wrote to share a common theme, as in Tenaya’s stories incorporating the 49ers, or to diffuse painful experiences, as in Marco’s story about the
thirty-year-old third-grader. They wrote to create a different reality, as in Rico’s fiction-ized story of the Cowboys Superbowl loss, and modified their texts to build community, as in Marco’s story presenting both the 49er’s and Cowboys as winners. They wrote for the sheer enjoyment of interacting with peers, as in Tenaya’s dog script for the class play, and to create lengthy encyclopedic accounts, as in Marco’s collaborations with Ralph on the football game anthology. They told stories to impress and display privileged information, as in Marco’s story about his girlfriend, and to share out-of-school experiences, as in Rico’s stories about walking his dogs. They wrote to participate in each other’s lived experiences, as in Tenaya’s copies of Raquel’s personal narratives, and to consider future outcomes as in Marco’s story about the symphony orchestra. They wrote to entertain, as in Rico’s rendition of the barbecuing dog, and to apologize, as in Marco’s letters to the principal. They wrote to reflect on their experiences, as in Tenaya’s story of her friendship with Raquel, and to brag as in Marco’s story about winning the go-cart race. They wrote to participate as members of a community actively engaged in storytelling. I watched my students engage in social interactions so different from my own personal writing experiences, and yet so clearly empowering, and wondered at the possibility that in their collaborative activity might lie the seeds of a new order of social relations (Smit, 1994).

I had observed students collaborating in the years before this study, and had been intrigued by the ways they interacted with each other around their texts. Fortunately, I had no preconceived ideas about student collaboration, no notion of how I might shape their interactions, and so I was able to simply watch and learn.
Writing Collaborations for Transcribing

My students' earliest collaborations centered around appropriating peer strategies for transcribing. This was a particularly crucial interaction for Tenaya because without assistance she was unable to create texts of peer-approved length or elaborate on any intended meaning. That is, the strategy that she herself devised of copying environmental print proved inadequate for composing, so she looked to her peers for assistance. The preoccupation with sheer text length, as opposed to considerations of other intentions for writing was evidenced by the many ways the issue of length came up in my students' exchanges. These interactions included querying each other, 'how much have you wrote?,' announcing that their writing would be 'done' when they had filled up their five-page pre-made booklet, or complaining that they had too many pages stapled together. That is, the arbitrary number of pages of the booklets they made then dictated for them how long their texts should be. As a result of this obsessive preoccupation, most of their earliest peer collaborations dealt exclusively with the mechanics of transcription. The following exchanges are typical of peer collaborations around these issues:

S1: 'How do you make pond?
S2: Like this, and then you go shooo and shoo and shoo (demonstrating circular letter formation in the air)
S3: 'Teacher, do you spell supper, s-u-p-p-e-r-?'
S4: 'How do you spell was?
S5: What was, w-a-s ?'
S4: WAS!'
S6: 'How do you spell bought?
S7: B-u...
S6: D-u?
Writing Collaborations for Story

Gradually, the overwhelming emphasis my students placed on length gave way to a greater emphasis on the story to be told. They began to talk about their developing stories in progress. These children, seated together while writing and illustrating their individual texts, were essentially thinking out loud:

S1: I'm gonna make a soda, but what kind of soda?
S2: A coca-cola.
S1: [No] I'm gonna make an ice cream.
S3: Thanks for the idea.
S2: You're copying her.
S3: No, I'm not gonna make ice-cream, I'm gonna make cotton candy.
S1: What's your popcorn look like, let me see. I love popcorn.
S2: I like pretzels.
S3: With cheese.

Students also talked with each other to develop writing topics, as in the following interaction:

S1: I don't know what to write.
S2: How about the Beetleborgs beat the Power Rangers?
S1: What, the Beetleborgs? No, they should beat them up because the Power Rangers are adults and the Beetleborgs are just kids.

In other peer interactions, students shared their works in progress both for assistance, and to check for peer response to their texts.

S1: I put ruff, ruff. Should I put 'I chase the cat'? How do you spell chase?
S2: c-h-a-s-e

And, they collaboratively worked out the details of writing shared texts.

S1: Who's gonna write the next part?
S2: I will.
S1: No, because you wrote the first part.
Problems in Peer Collaboration

Peer collaborations did not always operate smoothly. Often, my students’ interactions dealt with the problems of collaborative writing. These conflicts most often occurred in two specific areas: around affective issues of social exclusion and access, and around text issues of copyright and creative control.

Social Relationships

Writer’s Workshop provided daily opportunities for students to negotiate social relationships through their interactions with text. When the students shared relatively equal status in the classroom, their interactions with text served to cement their relationships and foster social cohesion. The social cohesion achieved through collaborative writing is evident in the previous vignettes I presented to illustrate the variety of writing interactions among peers. However, for Tenaya, and other low status students, Writer’s Workshop could easily become an arena for marginalization by peers. Very frequently Tenaya found herself on the outside of peer interactions, looking in. She lacked both the confidence and the social tools for gaining inclusion, and so I tried to give her support and direction as she battled to ‘join the club’. She chose to ignore my suggestions, however, and solved the problem of entrée in her own way, by playing one writing partner off the other.

Tenaya: (to me) I don’t have no one to write with and Patty said no you can’t write with me cause I’m doing something different.

Israel: Can you ask what she’s writing about?
Tenaya: (Rejecting my suggestion, turning to Patty) Are you working with Lilian?
Patty: Yeah.
Tenaya: (Turning to Lilian) Can I work with you?
Lilian: (Long, long pause) Yeah.

In their developing Discourse of writers, my students negotiated between their notion of mainstream expectations for writing, and their own socially embedded collaborative practices. Gradually mainstream influenced dictates of length and form gave way to an emphasis on the story to be told. The interaction among students-- of talk and text --became a cornerstone of Writer’s Workshop, and students negotiated social relationships that supported the creation of texts. For popular students, these social relationships were easily formed and the resulting writing collaborations were marked by patterns of acceptance and friendship. For less popular students, the social relationships that became part and parcel of the writing Discourse were themselves problematic and presented a potential barrier to membership in the writer’s club.

Problems of Authorship and Creative Control

The very real issue of determining the authorship of collaboratively created texts was a recurrent theme of peer conflicts in Writer’s Workshop. The sophisticated understanding my students had of the problems of joint authorship is evidenced by the following conversation between a student and me:

Israel: You look sad.
M: I don’t want them. ( Gesturing toward a group of other
girls)
Israel: Why not?
M: Because our ideas... I don't want them to say I copied them.
Israel: You don't like to work together?
M: Not with them. They keep copying me.
Israel: Who do you like to work with?
M: I don't know.
Israel: How could you work together in a way you would like?
M: I don't know. If I make up ideas and they do the same thing, they get all the credit.

The notion of creative control also became an issue for my students.
The very collaborative efforts that had earlier made it possible for them to write, (indeed, on which they had been dependent), now became a restrictive scaffold that impeded their process. As they became more fluent and confident as writers, they resisted and resented peer impositions on both the form and content of their texts. Yet, they had needed their peers' input in the past, and might want it again. The following conversation illustrates the complicated nature of refusing offered assistance:

Mario: (To me) It has mistakes! It's mine, too. See? It has my name. (He is pointing to the filename on the top of the document)
Sergio: (Keeps his hands over the keyboard, sitting perfectly still, protesting silently)
Mario: (Trying to reach around Sergio to the keyboard)
Israel: No. Wait, Mario
Mario: It's mine. (Pointing again to the filename)
Israel: Well, did Sergio ask for your help?
Mario: Yeah, well I'm just telling him how to spell 'are'. (Sergio has written 'ear')
Israel: Sergio, do you want Mario's help?
Sergio: No.
Israel: Well, then you have to let it go.
The need for creative control became more of an issue as the year progressed, students had more experience as writers, and developed a stronger sense of their intentions for their texts. At the end of the year, Tenaya demonstrated greater flexibility in negotiating topic selection with her writing partners in contrast to Marco and Rico. This flexibility appeared to have to do with her valuing of the social interaction over the text, and was generally more characteristic of the girls in the class, rather than the boys. However it may also have reflected Tenaya's relatively greater reliance on peers for assistance with transcribing her stories.

Marco and Rico, on the other hand, demonstrated an increasing desire for autonomy over their texts, and when faced with a choice between texts or partners, usually opted for their texts. This choice surfaced at mid year for Rico, partly in reaction to his classmates' avid corrections of his misspellings that interfered with his own writing process, and left him protesting the value of his story over their concerns with its form. Writing alone thus preserved for Rico the opportunity to develop his texts on his own. He presented his narratives for peer review only when they were sufficiently developed to withstand possible criticisms. One effect of this pattern was to limit Rico's opportunities for acquiring his peers' more standardized forms which was evident in the comparison of his final texts to both Tenaya’s and Marco’s texts. Word for word, his texts contained more non-standard and idiosyncratic spellings. However, his sense of purpose for writing was greatly developed by
the opportunity to share daily with his peers, and with few exceptions, Rico wrote ‘performance pieces’.

By the end of the year, Marco, for whom the opportunity to ‘write with friends’ had been the overriding initial motivation for his texts, also usually chose to compose alone. This had little to do with the rejection of peer interactions, but rather reflected his own deeply sophisticated perception of the metacognitive possibilities for print. His later texts reveal a developing awareness of writing as a tool for reflection, and while the text itself was usually intended for an audience, his process as a writer became more private. Marco used print to capture and reflect on who he was and might be. He commented on the permanency of print, conscious that his written texts could be revisited. He used them critically to contemplate possible lives -- in his writings he examined his identity as a Mexican (American) through his dancing, claiming his heritage through his acquisition of dance, rather than through language. However, he also embraced the collaborative impact of membership in the writing community once his texts were written. Sharing his texts with the audience of his peers acted to extend the power of his words beyond the page, and to validate the possible worlds he could imagine. Marco’s transformation as a writer graphically illustrated Freire’s concept of ‘conscientiao’ as he, claimed conscious awareness of his own literacy development and began to read the world in his own words. (Freire and Macedo, 1987)
Diversity of Collaborations

As the year came to a close, students separated into two distinct patterns of writing behavior. Some continued to compose collaboratively, creating with peers joint texts which they read at the author’s share. However, for other students, the collaborative activities that had assisted them to write in the first place were no longer necessary. With practice, they had become fluent writers who no longer need help with transcribing their words, and were hampered by the requirement in collaborative efforts, to please many cooks. Thus, for them, the collaborative impact of Writer’s Workshop came from sharing their completed texts with their peers. What had earlier been a social process between peers now became an internalized process within the individual. Yet, writing was still an intensely socially embedded practice, and the public forum of the daily author’s share remained an integral characteristic of the writing process.

Zones of Proximal Development

My observations and interactions with my students in Writer’s Workshop has been framed by Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory of learning: “Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first on the social level, and later on the individual level. First between people (inter psychological) and then inside the child (intra psychological) (p. 57) Smagorinsky (1994) defines the concept of the ZPD as “a range of ability with the upper reaches continually in a state of evolution: development consists of
using socially mediated assistance to move towards the higher levels of the range, with that range always itself developing into a new and advanced state.”

(p. 3) Smagorinsky’s elaboration of this concept was particularly descriptive of my students’ collaborations -- they used socially mediated assistance to move towards the higher levels of the range. That is, they sought from each other assistance to enhance their own development toward their own goal. As I reviewed their interactions, I was struck by the ways the zones of proximal development students created with each other differed from the kinds of zones I created with students. The kinds of zones I had typically created for and with my students were intended to help them see the larger picture. That is, through using their own writings I tried to help them generalize to other contexts. I also waited expectantly to see them apply the knowledge they gained from our interactions in their subsequent texts. I tried to be unfailingly patient, as I guided student development; I was after all the expert assisting the novice. I tried to keep my shaping conversations short and to the point. Lastly, I responded to the isolated text, rather than the text situated in experience.

**Student Created Zones of Proximal Development**

Student ZPD’s were significantly different from the kinds of zones I created with my students in six distinct ways:

1. They were situationally contextualized in the interactions of the moment.

2. They were quixotically both extremely directive and non-
demanding.

3. They were often pointedly critical.

4. The roles of novice and expert were flexible.

5. They talked together a great deal to effect relatively small changes in each other's texts.

6. They reconnected text and experience in deeply affective ways.

Situationally Contextualized Zones

My students responded to each other and their texts in the particular, rather than the general. They criticized or praised the specific text under consideration, and their comments to and about each other's writing reflected the actions of the moment and were often embedded in complex social interactions. The following two interactions are concerned with issues specific to the actual writing of texts:

This first vignette depicts the specificity of peer response— the second student responds only to that particular spelling request of the first student.

S1: 'Little, does it say little? (Meaning, is this supposed to be little?)
S2: Yeah.
S1: L-i... and 'e' goes off the end.
S2: I already put the 'e'.
S1: Yeah, but you can't see it.

In the second exchange, students expressed disapproval of their peers’ Writing project, invoking possible legal repercussions to lend weight to their criticism.

S1: That's not a rewrite. (Reading over the shoulder of several students copying from a children's book)
S2: We're not allowed to copy books.
S1: Yeah, they can get arrested.

The next two interactions were concerned with affective issues of collaborative writing. In the following conversation two children discussed the complicated social relationships that dictated who wrote with whom.

S1: Stacy and Ciara used to work together, but now Stacy works with us. She works with just me and Marialisa now.
S2: And now Ciara is working by herself on the couch, and Linette and Raquel are working in the spot that umm, Stacy and Ciara were working in.

In the next dialog, the first student was discussing the length of her intended text when the theme of the conversation changed to her imminent move and its effect on her collaborative writing project with the second student.

S1: I’m going to write a lot of pages on this one because I want to get better and better.
S2: I’ve got a lot of papers in mine.
S1: I do too.
S2: Because I’m going to be here a long time.
S1: Yeah.
S2: When you move Stacy will be my partner, Michelle or Stacy because they asked me, like when Michelle wrote down, “If Nicole leaves and you don’t have a partner for Writer’s Workshop, well you can just turn to me and I’ll help you.”

Directive Yet Non-Demanding Peer Interactions

While I eagerly anticipated the effect of my comments on my students’ subsequent texts, my students had no such expectation. Their directives to each other were very pointed, but they typically did not care whether their comments were taken to heart or not. They teased each other unmercifully
over reading errors, as when Marco miscued in his own story, reading aloud ‘my pink bike’ instead of ‘my bike’, but tolerated approximations in their own and each others texts, often questioning me as to whether a spelling ‘was close’. This phrase, *Is it close?* became a shorthand for *Does this match the dictionary spelling?* And, ‘close’ was certainly good enough, most of the time.

This pattern of directive yet non-demanding comment also occurred in interactions over content. In the following dialog students are discussing the effect of inflammatory material.

Rico: I know what I’ll put. I’ll put Cowboy’s drool and 49ers rule.
Marco: Why do you say stuff about Dallas (Cowboys)? People who like Dallas don’t say nothing about the 40 Whiners.
Rico: Yes they do. You just said the 40 *Whiners!*

However, when these texts were read at the author’s share, students did not comment negatively at the choice to leave the text unchanged. They were enormously respectful of each other’s decisions regarding text.

**Peer Criticism of Text: Honest Response**

While I attempted to be kind and supportive in my comments to students about their writing, they pulled no punches with each other. They were bluntly honest in their comments. They routinely criticized each others’ texts as stupid or repetitive, wondered exasperatedly out loud how a peer could write the word correctly in one sentence and incorrectly in the next, and rebuffed appeals for assistance with, ‘Hey, I just told you that!’ I cringed
when I overheard their interactions, particularly their criticisms of students like Tenaya for whom (in my opinion) any writing represented a triumph.

However, the effect of the peer critiques was far more positive than I had imagined. When Ralph commented critically of Tenaya’s writing, ‘Cats, cats, all she writes about is cats’, her response was to write on a different theme.

When Rico’s peers attacked his text with spelling and punctuation corrections, he responded by writing prolifically away from the public eye and sharing only his completed texts at reading time. When Rico’s peers commented negatively about his rottweiler’s undocked tail, rather than retreat, he wrote a rebuttal. In fact, rather than the silencing effect I anticipated from the peer criticisms, students were spurred on to develop new competencies.

Flexible Roles of Novice and Expert

Regardless of my desire to quiet my own voice, and allow my students to speak aloud, regardless of my desire to participate with my students as a mentor and guide, the reality of my greater competence and experience as a writer created specific undeniable outcomes. When I made suggestions it was almost impossible for students to choose not to incorporate them. (And indeed, I typically did expect students to apply what I taught them.) The interactions between my student and me were extremely unidirectional in that regard. As I reviewed my notes I realized that they never made suggestions to me about how I might change my texts, or make them better. I was the enthroned expert.
However, among my students these roles were considerably more flexible. Daiute and Dalton (1993) noted similar interactions among the students of their study. Their investigation focussed on the writing strategies used by students described as either good or poor spellers. In that study, good spellers tended to write together, and poor spellers tended to write together. Thus the hierarchy of competency was somewhat diminished and among writers of approximately equal competency, the roles of novice and expert appeared flexible. However, in my investigation, students of extremely disparate competencies often wrote together, and the permeability of expert and novice roles was still maintained. Although there were students who were both good spellers and good storytellers, in their collaborations the roles were more divided. Novice versus expert status fell into the two specific areas of spelling-transcribing, or storytelling. As in the Daiute and Dalton study, poor spellers were rarely the experts when transcribing text with good spellers. However, Tenaya found a way to attain expert status as a speller by privately conferencing with me, or an expert peer, and presenting the garnered spelling to her writing partners.

However, in the most common interaction I observed by far, both collaborators claimed expert status. Students who were participating with peers in a collaborative project would either contribute text-transcribing strategies or text-creating strategies. Thus, two students could simultaneously enjoy the role of expert with one commanding expert status as the scribe, and
the other commanding expert status as the storyteller. This type of interaction provided an enormously effective scaffold for the least competent and unconfident writers, and many of Tenaya’s texts were created this way. The collaborators frequently created several copies of the same co-created text, and this gave writers like Tenaya valuable practice in transcribing her own text—practice in more standardized forms of spelling that later transferred into her other writings. In another common interaction, students shared expert status by taking turns to create a text. In this way each student alternately participated as expert in both storytelling and transcribing.

No Economy of Words

While I tended to keep my comments to students brief and to the point, this did not characterize their own interactions over text. All of the vignettes I have presented in this discussion clearly illustrate how much my students talked about writing, and often what small effect their words had. Yet, they were not at all displeased with their peers’ choices to incorporate or not their suggestions.

Affective Connections: Recontextualizing of Print into Experience

The last, and perhaps most significant zone of proximal development was created through the student interactions that occurred in the daily sharing of their stories.

Werstch (1990, 1996) has decried the institutional elevation of the
decontextualized rationality of print, noting the overwhelming preference in school literacy tasks for objective text, particularly in instances where other more subjective texts would work as well or better. For my students, the daily sharing of their stories provided an opportunity to recontextualize their text into experience, recreating the link between the 'rational' print, and the context of the original experience. Students' texts often provoked strong affective responses for both author and audience: In the following story, Chico did not include the significant last lines, until, seated at the author's circle, he pencilled them in. Through sharing his story Chico was able to resituate his text in the experience, thereby able to retrieve both the memory and the words to name the memory:

I had a dog named Guero. My dad told his friend to let him go and I didn't see him no more and I had a Dog named Boy and I moved and my Dad left him in the back yard. And he didn't have nothing to eat and he couldn't get out of the yard and he died. We went back and he died.

At the conclusion of his reading Chico put his head down on his arms and sobbed. Later another student commented on his own dog story:

'I read mine to the classroom, because it wasn't that big of a deal. But to our family it was a big deal, because he got ranned over right in front of our yard.'

ZPD's in Summary

The zones of proximal development my students created revealed, as do all Discourses, the underlying ideological framework. Highly valued were
all collaborative efforts, situation-specific interactions, an acceptance of approximations, honest critique, and an increasing sum (Takaki, 1987) of writing possibilities in which collaborating students participated as experts by doing what they did best. Through collaborative interactions they also received implicit practice in less well-developed areas through both observation and direct copying of peer process. They valued conversation, and talked to connect, rather than direct. The role of talk was extended in their written texts, and they wrote to connect and reflect, to share their lives, their pain, and their joy.

**Writer’s Workshop as a Revolutionized Context for Emancipatory Literacy**

**Institution Barriers to Becoming Critically Literate**

Stanton-Salazar (1997), in addressing institutional barriers to academic success of minority language and culture children, refers to Gee, specifically his concept of Discourses. Gee (1996) describes Discourse in this way. 'A discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and ‘artifacts’, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’, or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful ‘role’(p. 131). The Discourse of schooled literacy is characterized by a penchant for the decontextualized rationality of print. Bearing as little trace as possible of its origins, schooled literacy provides little
opportunity for students of other traditions to *decode the system*. (p. 13) As an educator of minority language and culture students that has become my job—to help my students decode the system. Somehow I must determine a supportive balance between implicit and explicit strategies: somehow I must find the balance between fostering voice and fostering access. Somehow I must find a way to foster the growth and conscious awareness of their own culturally influenced Discourses and simultaneously induct them into the Discourse of Power (Delpit 1988, Heath 1983). Yet, I work with little children, eight years old, and am deeply conscious of Wayne O’Neil’s (1977) admonishment, that one may foster schooled literacy at the expense of ‘proper literacy’. That once those culturally contextualized ways with words are supplanted by schooled literacy, they may not ever be accessible again. I ponder this as I search through the publisher’s lists for minority language and culture authors. Why so few? Politics of the press? Undeniably so. Yet perhaps also, because decades ago in their own third grade classrooms their proper literacy was supplanted, and they can no longer get back to their own stories. Because, unlike Yolanda, in Julia Alvarez novel *YO!*, there is no one to reclaim that voice and say, ‘My daughter, the future has come and we were in such a rush to get here! We left everything behind and forgot so much. Ours is now an orphan family. My grandchildren and great-grandchildren will not know the way back unless they have a story. Tell them of our journey’ (Alvarez 1997 p. 309).
Salazar (1997) and Ogbu (1983, 1994) describe the seemingly insurmountable barriers for minority language and culture children faced with decoding the system and acquiring the cultural logic of the dominant group (p. 13), and for whom the adoption of the mainstream funds of knowledge may require a repudiation of their own. Salazar also identifies the barrier of institutionalized individualism, "and the corresponding moral view... that competition and the pursuit of self interest [is] a natural and superior means by which people are motivated to attain their highest level of human functioning" (p. 29). Thus, mainstream instructional practices embedded in this ideology act almost automatically to undermine or dismiss collaborative learning. Yet, Salazar argues convincingly that minority student achievement is dependent upon the opportunity for collaborative interactions in a bicultural social network. He suggests that through interactions with institutional agents—including teachers—minority students can 'learn to engage socially those agents and participants in mainstream worlds and social settings who control or manage critical resources.' That, through interactions with peers, 'minority children...learn to engage in the academic process communally...they must remain embedded in familial and communal support systems while they participate in other worlds.' (p. 33)
Considerations of Race

In the following discussion I will present a personal history of the development of the ideology of race, or rather an ideology of whiteness, that guides me as an educator, indeed as a person. The evolution of my thinking in race terms has followed a complex evolution. My perspective as an educator of race/ethnic minority children was originally guided by the notion of a multicultural curriculum founded on acceptance and acknowledgement of diverse cultural groups. As I became increasing aware of race as a limiting factor in the education of my students, I was forced into a critical consciousness of the privilege afforded me by dint of my white skin and economic status, in contrast to the lack of privilege enjoyed by my students of color. I began to recognize the dialectics of power that determined what voices were heard and valued. I came to understand the politics of language distribution that created opportunities for some and silence for others. I saw how not only opportunities to speak and be heard, but the ontological value of the speaker were determined by the very language—or the dialect of English that one spoke. I saw how the fundamental issue of race was obscured by the dialectics of prestige and power. I finally understood the necessity of demystifying race politics on both the personal and social level that is crucial to the goals of educating for social reform and the creation of liberatory educational practices.

White teacher, children of color: The politics of race in the classroom

Over the years I have struggled with my role as a white teacher of race/ethnic minority children. Indeed, it was an increasing awareness of the significance of race on the
education of my Southeast Asian refugee students that compelled me to pursue graduate studies in the first place.

I use the label race/ethnic minority deliberately, in spite of its potential to offend those I describe. I find it problematic that other terminology, coined to avoid the connotations of inferior status, (anagrams such as ALANA, for African-American, Latin-American, Native-American), also conveniently obscures the power differential that characterizes race relations. Cultural diversity thus divorced from social, political, economic context becomes a sanitized concept, merely a matter of colorizing the advertisements in the magazines.

As a teacher of race minority children I have taught in neighborhood schools of communities ravaged by poverty and gang violence, where a third grader was shot to death in a ‘drive-by accident’ walking home from school, where only a handful of fifth graders had a living father who was not incarcerated, and where rain kept children home because their only pair of pants hadn’t dried on the clothesline. As I looked into the brown and black faces of my students and their families, I was forced to recognize the overwhelming interaction of poverty and race, everyday. I recognized my privileged status as I went home at the end of the day, to my ‘mixed’ neighborhood whose fifteen-minute distance from the school represented a world of difference from the neighborhood of my students, where my own children walked in relative safety to their friends’ houses, and swam in each other’s pools. Here race difference was mediated by economic status, my neighbors and I were peers of material acquisition, homeowners, professionals, registered voters.
Still, during those years I was comfortable as a white educator at Palo Verde Elementary School. As a white person, I was in the numerical minority. My concerns about my de facto participation in the social reproduction model of school faded. The brown faces my students saw were not custodians and kitchen help, but teachers and instructional staff. My voice was simply one of many, and I felt secure that I had plenty to learn as well as offer in a multiethnic environment.

Interactions of Race and Power

When I returned to the northeast after several years in the southwest, I was confronted again with the dilemma of what I defined as the appropriateness of my place as the white teacher of race-minority children. My third-grade bilingual class, along with a fourth-fifth grade combination, was bused across town to one of the newly built schools. Now I taught in a school with no race-minority teachers. The only people of color on the entire staff were two instructional assistants in the bilingual program. In this environment, my whiteness became again a marker of privilege, a potential symbol of difference between my students and myself, and a demarcation of opportunity for people like me, and people like them. I was again confronted with the implications of whiteness.

This time, however, I was not surrounded by my friends of color, to reassure me that they were glad to know me: to have an anti-racist colleague, to confirm for me the appropriateness of my place as a member of a multiethnic learning community. This time it became clear, that as a white person I am a de facto supremacist. This may sound extreme, but I am increasingly convinced that it is not. Consider the following contrast where I use the unqualified signifier MEN as a parallel to the unqualified signifier WHITE.
As a woman, I am somewhat comforted by bumper stickers proclaiming *Another Man Against Violence Against Women*. I am pleased that MEN are reflecting on the effect of their gender, and the historical treatment of women, physical, cultural, and economic. Perhaps the world will become a safer place for my own daughter. I appreciate their commitment to combating violence against women, but I may not want to hear their stories. If MEN choose to locate themselves outside the paradigm of male domination, I want them to use their male power to help women learn how to protect against it, to participate as aggressors in self-defense classes, for example. Still, I do not want MEN to join support groups for women addressing male oppression. Why? Because I am afraid of that historically situated category: MEN.

The fear of the historiological category MEN I discuss above is recast in race terms by bell hooks (1995) in a description of that surfacing fear in her experience at a conference on cultural studies:

> Attending the conference because I was confident that I would be in the company of like minded, 'aware', progressive individuals, I was disturbed when the usual arrangements of white supremacist hierarchy were mirrored both in terms of who was speaking, of how bodies were arranged on the stage, of who was in the audience. All of this revealed the underlying assumptions of what voices were deemed worthy to speak and be heard. As the conference progressed I began to feel afraid. If these progressive people, most of whom were white, could so blindly reproduce a version of the status quo and not 'see' it, the thought of how racial politics would be played out 'outside' this arena was horrifying. The feeling of terror I had known so intimately in my childhood surfaced. (p. 48)

This is part of what Darder (1993) addresses in her comparative study of white versus Latino critical educators. As a critical educator, I can work to demystify the hegemonic practices in schools. I can work to facilitate the development of voice in my
students. I can work to bring their lived experiences into our classroom; I can work to help my colleagues recognize the intrinsic value of multiple ways with words. Yet, as a white educator, I cannot share in my students' experiences as minority group members. Lazarre (1996) eloquently describes this insurmountable barrier of whiteness as a teacher of Black students.

'I want to identify with your story,' he will tell a white woman who has written a moving memoir about disappointment with her father's distance from her. 'I see that your emotion is real, and I want to feel it too,' he will say, 'But I can't. I have no room for those kinds of angers. I am angry at racism. I am angry at slavery. I am angry that some place inside I still believe I am not as good as you.' (p. 39)

If I were Black, I could at least mitigate the pain on his face by taking some of it onto myself; I feel that way too, at times, I might say; we all do, even the most successful of us. (p. 40)

Like Lazarre, I will always be a member of that category WHITE, my very skin a symbol of the dominant ideology, regardless of my own awareness of whiteness as an ideology beyond race, an ideology that I reject.

Giroux (1997) speaks of the ideology of whiteness, an ideology of institutionalized individualism, the old-boy's network, an ideology that describes current hegemonic political, economic, social practices that perpetuate institutionalized racism and structural inequality. hooks (1995) in her conversation with a Black colleague and her white partner, describes moving beyond the ideology of whiteness:

...We talk about the way white people who shift location, as her companion has done, begin to see the world differently. Understanding how racism works, he can see the way in which whiteness acts to terrorize without seeing himself as bad, or all white people as bad, and all black people as good. (p. 49)
I have chosen to shift location, to see the world differently. Yet, in a society that quickly draws boundaries of us, and them along color lines, I am conscious that the historical situatedness of whiteness creates a potentially limiting factor for me as a critical bilingual educator.

Revolutionizing the Context: Writers Workshop as Liberatory Practice

What was it about Writer's Workshop that allowed it to function as a place of liberatory experience?

While the original framework of Writer's Workshop was originally extremely teacher directed, over time, Writer's Workshop was transformed into an intensely child directed arena. It became a place where the Discourse of interaction was born out of the children's experiences, cultural knowledge, intentions and language.

The collaborative nature of Writer's Workshop was facilitated by the children's goals for social cohesion, as they created text worlds through social interactions, and social relationships through their interactions with text (Dyson 1989). The zones of proximal development that were created in peer collaborations allowed children to move beyond their individual efforts, and to stretch toward the competencies of their peers. This process stood out in its contrast to the teacher created zones in which students are pushed toward the higher reaches of the zone according to external assessments of their potential for growth. In order to participate with them, I (the teacher), rather than they (the students), had to be educated and inducted into the Discourse of their
literacy world.

The shared valuing of writing as a cultural tool by the both home and school community facilitated the development of Writer’s Workshop as a forum where student voice could develop. As children wrote and shared their stories, both their voices and the voice of the community found a place within the school. This was doubly enhanced when parents also chose to contribute to the bound collections of children’s stories which were then ‘published’ by the district printing center. Thus the community-based funds of knowledge interacted with mainstream discourses and manner of display, and mirrored the balance of explicit and implicit learning experiences that inducted students into the discourse of power.

Through the interplay of talk and text students mediated the acquisition of decontextualized print through its constant recontextualization as experience. I am not suggesting that writing is merely talk written down. In fact, my students’ awareness of the literary nature of print was evidenced by their elaborated texts, and made it clear that writing was a genre in and of itself. The poetic style of Tenaya’s cat stories, the tongue in cheek asides of Rico’s barbecuing dog, clearly illustrated their intentions for print not expressed in oral language. However, through talk they situated themselves as authors bringing their life’s experiences within the boundaries of the classroom and their text.

Participating in Writer’s Workshop became an intensely personal
experience, in which children entrusted their stories and lives to their friends. They shared the very essence of who they were and who they were becoming in a manner of deep reflection that impacted powerfully on the Discourse of Writer’s Workshop. The collective weight of their personal narratives created a social history that spoke to the political nature of their literacy education (Edgerton 1992). In the daily reading and discussion of their texts arose a compilation of generative words (Freire 1973) that acknowledged the social realities of minority experience outside the classroom. Thus we were engaged consciously in liberatory practices against the dialectic of social control and silence that characterized other school and out-of-school experiences.

Perhaps Writer’s Workshop functioned as a forum for the bicultural social networks proposed by Stanton-Salazar (1997) as necessary for minority academic success. He posits the necessity for institutional agents—teachers as well as peers—who can make explicit the hidden agendas, and the ‘rules of the game’ that control access to school capital, by providing role modeling, emotional and moral support, evaluative feedback, advice and guidance (p. 11). He suggests the need for minority language and culture children to develop coping strategies that acknowledge their subordinate or outsider status vis-à-vis the dominant culture. He points to a collective approach as key to decoding the implicit Discourse of schools. Writer’s Workshop embodied all of these characteristics; I as well as peers functioned as instructional agents for the group, the generative words that arose from my students texts created
opportunities for examining the institutional and structural limits that face members of minority groups. Collaborative interactions were the very heart of Writer’s Workshop. The very heart. That is the piece that Writer’s Workshop provided about which I had known nothing. I knew nothing about the affective power of writing with friends. It was only after my accidental participation in a writer’s project that I came to understand what might be meant about collaboration containing the seeds of a new social order. I too required the recontextualizing of my stories into shared experience. As later I reflected on my students conversations, how new worlds became possible as they formed the words to frame them, I realized that I didn’t come to know through my writing, I came to know through sharing my texts. In Chinese mythology, the panda cub is born amorphous, and only takes form as his mother licks him into the shape of a bear. Perhaps we humans are also so formed, through the experience of our words in another’s ear, as members of community gathered for mutual support.
CHAPTER SEVEN: IMPLICATIONS

I have shared with my elementary school colleagues what I have learned from my students about teaching writing, about Writer’s Workshop as a forum for emancipatory education. And while they are frequently impressed by the results, no one, to date, has chosen to build its practice into their day. The dialectic of freedom and authority leaves too much room for change. All that talking, and we distrust talk in schools. Perhaps I simply have not been able to present my case rationally enough to be heard in those institutional arenas, for however much I modulate my voice I am far too passionate. It is interesting how quickly an argument can be dismissed if it betrays the speaker’s passion. Indeed, the affect is the fastest destroyer of decontextualized rationality. Yet, it is exactly in that passion that the seeds of emancipatory education can be found. Freire’s (1973) generative words were fighting words, images from the very lives of his students, words steeped in history and meaning. Little wonder that practitioners of mainstream instructional methodologies view them with mistrust. Education is indeed political act, and as Gee (1994) eloquently warns, ‘Literacy education is not for the timid.’ (p. 39)

Not very long ago I was chafing to explore possibilities of employment outside of my classroom. I wanted the chance to work with other teacher educators imparting what I have learned about emancipatory practices with young and pre-service teachers. I longed for the chance to better the school
lives of minority language and culture children through the education of their future teachers. I watched with increasing despair as my students struggled to interact in the stratified world of public school, each day alive with the hope that they would be seen and treated with same respect as their white peers. Yet, only within the four walls of our classroom can my students truly experience the notion of "possible lives". Today, I am ambivalent about venturing beyond my third grade classroom. The changes I see each day in my students as they grow in empowerment are far too precious. I no longer believe that what I have learned is easily transmitted. It is a passion, and passion cannot be passed on like a baton. I have no complex list of do's or don'ts that can be incorporated into ongoing instruction. What I propose is rather a deep commitment to demystifying the ideology of mainstream instructional practices. Kincheloe (1992) has long suggested the view of curriculum as social psychoanalysis. First, I believe, we must turn the mirror to ourselves.

Aspects of Emancipatory Practice

I cannot reduce Writer's Workshop to a finite set of variables. Indeed, the most fascinating aspect of Writer's Workshop, is its indefinable shape outside the specific contexts of children and teacher. However, there are clearly aspects that must be present if Writer's Workshop is to be an emancipatory practice, aspects of community, voice, purpose, conversation, collaboration, and shared texts.
I am equally concerned with voice and access, but the instructional balance of the two has much to do with the level of fluency and voice already controlled by the student. I am aware that developing voice is fragile, particularly of minority language and culture children who rarely hear their voices and the voice of their community within schools; it is easily crushed into silence by instruction in the mainstream ways with words. Purpose for writing must always be in the hands of the children, and teachers must be equally engaged in determining the purpose of the texts we are writing, seated alongside our students. This is perhaps the most difficult part of Writer’s Workshop—that of participating as a member of the writing community. We teachers are always hungry for the few extra moments to research curriculum, grade papers, review science journals. Writer’s Workshop is not the time for such activities. How can we provide the role modeling, emotional and moral support, evaluative feedback, advice and guidance so significant for our students’ success if we are not totally present in the process? Unless we are also partners in the creation of texts we can easily forget how difficult and demanding a task writing can be.

I have come to view conversation and collaboration as the cornerstones of writing process, indeed one cannot exist without the other. The sheer quantity and complexity of both my students’ conversations and collaborations marked Writer’s Workshop as a place of social interaction. Certainly writing also occurs in quiet spaces, but I have been continually amazed at the
interactional mediating effect of talk and text.

How these aspects are enacted in a Writer’s Workshop depends upon the idiosyncratic nature of the writers themselves and the interactional context of the moment. They must be considered against the philosophical framework of emancipatory education that grounds and drives instruction.

Purpose

Consider Miguel, in this hypothetical example. Copying is not likely to advance the goals of critical reflective literacy and therefore it is probably not useful for students to copy books. Yet Miguel is passionate about dinosaurs and is determined to commit the first two pages of the science text to memory. Later I observe that Miguel has alternated pages of copied text with information of his own. In this instance copying has provided a scaffold to other more significant experiences with print. Or conversely, after three days Miguel has copied down four pages of incomprehensible text that he waves about with inordinate pride. Three days... I think his literacy development will survive three days of delay, and the mediating effect of his copied text may have outcomes I cannot expect or predict.

Voice

It is impossible to foster voice if students have never experienced speaking and being heard. It is far from unusual for my students to have never experienced having their words received by another. I could never suggest outside of the specific context of interactions that another teacher make the
choices I have made. I have forced my students to read aloud at the daily author’s share, inwardly quaking at the sound of their voices cracking under the strain of breaking the silence. And sighed with relief as the following days revealed that that forced experience opened the way for them to share their subsequent texts with increasing confidence.

Conversation

This remains the most difficult aspect of Writer’s Workshop for my colleagues to tolerate. How can anything constructive be happening in the midst of so much talking! Yet time and time again I have seen the mediating effect of talk and text, and imagine that to silence one may silence the other. I have autocratically insisted on silent writing when my instincts told me that the topics under discussion could have no possible connection to the creation of texts. Still, I deeply believe in the power of dialog to resituate narratives in print in the narratives of life, and my tolerance for talk is high.

Collaboration

Everything I know about collaboration I learned first from my students. I had participated myself as an adult in collaborative projects and I had found them to be a morass of complicated negotiations around issues of ego, ownership, and direction. Somehow it wasn’t real collaboration unless at least two of us were struggling simultaneously over the same piece of text, mangled beyond recognition as we each tried to shape it according to our own purposes. In a grant writing project we eventually assigned each other
separate sections of the project, relieved to have some creative control, yet each feeling that somehow we were cheating. Nevertheless, I have had other wonderful collaborative experiences, grant writing with a friend, giddy with laughter over the power-packed phrases we loaded with the requisite jargon and almost incomprehensible grant-ese. And, I have had experienced the tremendous satisfaction of sharing texts in progress with other writers, friends in the struggle to coax the words to carry our intended meaning. These experiences with friends—writing with friends—that is collaboration. That is what I learned from my students—collaboration requires an affective connection.

Sharing texts

Sharing texts, finished or in progress, was one of the most significant collaborative interactions my students engaged in. I had become so focussed on collaborations involving works in progress, collaborations that allowed texts come to life for writers for whom that support was so crucial, that I sometimes failed to recognize the power of sharing texts among peers. Through my observations of students I came to recognize in my own life as a writer how necessary that sharing is. Writing becomes most meaningful as a shared experience—text resituated in dialog among friends.

Incremental Progress

To my eyes, by the end of the year Rico, Tenaya, Marco, were light-years in literacy development from where they had begun the school year.
Still, I worried that this progress, in comparison to school expectations for grade-level achievement, would fail to impress their next year’s teacher. I had had to train myself to recognize the tiny developments in my students’ writing, to recognize and help them recognize the incremental yet significant changes in their texts, their process, their intentions for print.

Typical school assessments, however, are not concerned with actual individual growth, but rather comparative data against normed criteria. That type of assessment can only reveal the discrepancy between what my students know, and what they are expected to know. It cannot track their remarkable achievement and project the likelihood of future success. Measured against grade level expectations, and in atomistic exercises, I fear that these students will not be able to demonstrate their literacy development.

**In Summary**

Community, voice, purpose, conversation, collaboration, shared texts, recognition of incremental progress. These seem so attainable, and yet I fear that for my minority language and culture students these factors that have framed writing as a liberatory practice will not be placed within their reach. Yet it is my overwhelming experience that without them, my students will fail to thrive, fail to achieve, fail to imagine the enactment of possible lives. It is far too easy to locate the reasons for their failure within the students themselves, in their Discourses that mesh awkwardly with mainstream dialog, in the poverty that marks so many of their lives. It is far too easy to point to the
institutionalized racism that limits options for access, far too easy to simply
give up. But there are actions we can take, within our classrooms and within
our schools, that challenge the invisibility of stratification, dialogues we can
enter into, strategies we can teach, actions essential if we are to facilitate the
dialectic of freedom and authority beyond the confines of our classrooms.

Taking Action

One situation we must address is the overwhelming labeling of minority
children as having special needs, and therefore requiring special instruction
away from their peers. In my experience, and certainly borne out by the cases
presented in this study (see epilogue), this label results in instructional
practices that are in diametric opposition to the very characteristics of
emancipatory education. In the special education program my students
received (which I believe to represent a very typical model) the intentions for
print, the form and manner of display, were teacher imposed. The notions of
student purpose and voice, were not a concern of special education: the goal of
instruction was to remediate failure. Therefore, the instructional activities
were most often selected by the Specialist to provide practice in the very
literacy tasks the child could not successfully achieve. Indeed, after several
instructional sessions, my students were well aware of their failings.

The disruptive nature of the pull-out program wreaked havoc on the
relationships my students were struggling to establish as members of a learning
community. Each time my students were 'pulled-out' for special education tutoring they were separated from the collaborative community that so deeply supported their growth as writers. Thus, the very children for whom collaborative activity was simultaneously essential for their growth, and enormously difficult to achieve, had this process interrupted on a regular basis. Each time they were 'pulled-out' they had to remake their connections with both peers and text, and rewrite themselves into the room.

Our educational institutions are quick to mark difference and find it deficient. We need to protect our students from these 'othering' practices. The survival of our students' voices into adulthood may well depend on the their experience of voice as children.

Future Directions

I am curious now about other aspects of my students' writing. I am curious about their topics, and how identity is shaped and revealed by their texts. I have begun to rethink my practice of referring to my students' texts as stories. I chose to refer to my students' texts as stories in order to honor them, and encourage my reader to honor them as well. Still, that has perhaps obscured for me the patterns of growth as children's texts progressed from attribute lists to stories demonstrating a chronology: movement over time. In retrospect I see this development in Tenaya's texts, as she gradually moved away from attribute lists to personal narrative. Perhaps next time I will view student texts differently.
I am amazed at the huge themes that characterize their writings, of race, power, and access. I wonder at the interaction of author(ship) and authority, an etymological relationship I see borne out by practice as my students assume power and status through their texts. I am curious to examine the use of popular culture by my students. That is, not so much the themes themselves, but the way they use popular themes for their own goals of community building. Children occasionally chose to write on aggressive or violent themes that had me ferociously rethinking my position on avoiding censorship. Yet they used these common themes, of football, lowriders, and fighting, to forge a common ground where they behaved in remarkably humanistic ways with each other. They shared the role of Superbowl winner pretty equitably, each child getting a chance to proclaim his favorite team the champion. They agreed to disagree over game statistics. They negotiated the use of derogatory labels, as they talked and wrote about the forty-whiners and the cowgirls.

Just a few days ago I was walking through a shopping plaza and I overheard a young boy talking with his father. The little boy, maybe five years old, was telling his father a fantasy story in which he, the boy, was battling wild animals by punching them in the nose. He would stop after each phrase to grin at his father, and to invite him to join in the tale. But the father insisted on responding to content of the story, rather than its purpose. Each time he responded that he hoped the boy would not punch the animals, that he did not like the story, that it wasn’t nice to hurt animals. His son, desperate for his father to ‘get with the program’ of creating a collaborative fantasy responded in turn by escalating the violent action. His father told him to be quiet. I want to remember this
when my students write about blood and poop and squashing bugs. I want to remember to
look beneath the words, and find the message.

I ponder how I, who share the race and privilege of the dominant class, can
participate in the education of the minority language and culture children I have come to
admire so greatly. I find comfort in the notion of Whiteness as an ideology beyond skin
color, the hope that I can reach beyond phenotypic descriptors of race and choose to
locate myself as a social worker within a framework of human emancipation (Giroux
1992). I see myself, tomorrow, seated at the table with my young students, sharing in the
community of writers. I look forward to joining with them and other teachers as we
search out ways to participate in a pedagogy of hope.
Almost a year after I completed my study I was finally able to return for a visit to Palo Verde School. I was anxious to see all my students, but particularly Rico, Tenaya, and Marco, whose faces I carry with me in my mind, and pasted to my computer tower. It was an odd experience to visit my school as an outsider: this location which had been such a powerful community when I lived there. My closest colleagues welcomed me warmly, but there had been many staff changes, including a new administrator, that increased my sense as ‘the other’. Most of my past students, too, welcomed me, disregarding the commonly enacted (and unspoken) convention which demands that loyalty to the previous year’s teacher be replaced by exclusive loyalty to the current one. However, maintaining these concurrent relationships proved too difficult for several girls, who announced to me that their fourth grade teacher (whom I had not met) did not like me. In this uncomfortable stance, straddling the insider/outsider boundary, I found Rico and Tenaya.

Rico had lost his smile, the mark of easy confidence. He walked round-shouldered, and his voice was so quiet I could not hear his greeting. His teacher, certified in special education, had quickly referred him for additional services, and he now received all of his instruction in a pull-out resource program. In the face of this child, now so clearly convinced of his inferiority as a learner, I could not find the Rico I had known. I could not uncover the child who had written about his long tailed rottweiler, or the salsa-eating dog. When I reminded him of his stories, his face lit, briefly. He still had the dog, he told me. I didn’t ask him if he still wrote. I didn’t want to suggest, inadvertently, that
he was failing to write, maybe letting me down. I wouldn’t be there to admire his writing, and I feared the reaction his text might receive in his classroom.

Tenaya was also in the resource room. She, however, would not be there next year. She had been assigned to a self-contained classroom for children with special needs. She was marked by and for absolute school failure. Everything about her bespoke despair. Her braids were gone, and her fluffy hair stood out in ragged tufts on her head. Every time I saw her, she was wandering the hall. She appeared friendless, and without the support of daily classroom interactions, perhaps was simply unable to connect with her peers. She tracked me down each day I was at the school, stuffing folded pictures of trees, rainbows and hearts into my hand. Her teacher was relieved that Tenaya would be in the special program next year, and commented enthusiastically about Tenaya’s improved behavior. She didn’t fight anymore, and was very quiet in the classroom.

Marco had been moved to a neighboring school when the attendance boundaries were again redrawn. To my surprise, although the secretary did not know me, she called him down to the office so I could visit with him. She didn’t know if he was actually in school that day, he was out a couple of days every week. At the time of my visit in May he had missed about forty days of school. He was a tough kid, she remarked. Marco sat down two chairs away from me. He smiled only briefly; no sign of the charm that had gotten him labeled as an ‘operator’ the year before. He didn’t like school. He was still dancing with the Banda Mercedes, some of the time. He didn’t appear to be particularly interested in my visit, and after I told him I didn’t think I would be moving back, he seemed ready to leave. The meeting was awkward, and I could not find a way to reconnect. I looked
back as I went out the door, but he was already headed upstairs. I watched until he disappeared but he did not look back.

When I contrast the portrait of these three children against my memories of them, I am aghast at how quickly a child can be crushed. In only a few months Rico was reduced from a writer with a voice, to struggling and silenced student. In only a few months Tenaya was reduced from loud talking negotiator to silenced loner. In only a few months Marco became a truant with ever weakening connections to school experiences. How can it still be possible, that a child's school experiences can focus so completely on what he is perceived to lack, that the child himself is lost? How is it possible that these three children went from being social actors in their own education, to failures slated for remedial instruction?

Early in my investigations of children writing together, I gave a presentation at a graduate seminar of my findings. I was surprised at the vehement responses my fellow students and teaching colleagues expressed. After all, I wasn’t (then) promoting a pedagogy, but rather sharing what I had learned. Yet, they were angry. “What will happen to those kids next year, Archer, when they’re in another classroom?” they challenged. “You see the changes in their writing, but what about the State assessments?” I didn’t understand the anger that accompanied their queries then, but I understand it now. This pedagogy, if you will, of collaboration, connection and community, has profound effects on student development. But, it takes time. It takes more than a year, or maybe even two, to replace a child’s internalization of literacy as a school task, with the notion of literacy as a tool for transformation. It takes a lot of
writing and sharing to bring that notion to the level of invariant knowledge, where that
notion of writing cannot be easily undermined by the voices of authority. Until our
schools become places where what children bring to us is as valued as what we teachers
bring to them, then we will continue to fail the Rico’s and Tenaya’s and Marco’s in our
classrooms. It will look like they have failed, but the failure will be ours. We will have
failed to participate as co-learners with our students. We will have failed to learn new
‘ways with words’. We will have failed to enter with our students into the creation of new
worlds and the consideration of possible lives. We will have failed to arm our students
with the tools for their transformation.
POST SCRIPT

In the stories of Tenaya, Rico and Marco, I described Writer’s Workshop as an element of an emancipatory curriculum. Yet the epilogue clearly depicted the silenced, dispirited, disengaged students they had become one short year later. How is it possible then, to describe this pedagogy of collaboration as a liberatory practice? Can an educational practice be considered liberatory if it doesn’t last?

Both this query and the answer came about in the dialog between my doctoral committee and me at the final defense of this dissertation. I am deeply grateful for that opportunity to finally define why I continue to believe so strongly in Writer’s Workshop as a significant emancipatory practice. Freire described coming to critical consciousness as an experience akin to religious conversion. That is, having once perceived of the world from such a perspective, one can never completely revert to the previous state of ‘not knowing’. I believe this is also true of critical consciousness, that, as in the indefatigability of grace, there is an equally powerful awakening that occurs when one becomes of critically aware. In the face of enormous barriers that I know my young students may experience it is my faith in this indefatigability of critical consciousness that sustains me.
REFERENCES


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