

THE ENACTMENT OF LITERACY LEARNING PRACTICES: A CLOSE READING OF
JULIUS CAESAR BY HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to describe how students' talk unfolded during literacy learning experiences in an English Language Development (ELD) classroom of students in grades 9-12. NAEP data indicates that "less than 10 percent of 17 year olds, regardless of race/ethnicity or SES, are able to comprehend complex texts" (Lee & Spratley, 2010, p. 2). And if we look at the literacy practices of secondary school students in general, despite increasing attention on adolescents' literacy practices, there continues to be compelling evidence that there is little to no growth in literacy proficiencies in high school (Lee, 1995).

This ten-week study was conducted using ethnographic methods of data collection to develop deeper understandings of students' literacy practices and participation as students of literature. Data for this study included classroom observations, which were analyzed using constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and discourse analysis (Gee, 2005). The students in this study were all students for whom English was an additional language and who attended high school in a mid-size urban high school in the southwest. Data included 20 class periods of video clips.

Findings indicated that students engaged in specific literacy practices during these small group interactions. Students' talk indicated that their practices included: metacognitive awareness and conversation, cognitive strategy use, and persistence with difficult text. This study extends the research by providing an illustration of

what students do when they are offered the opportunity to make meaning of challenging text.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to describe how students' talk unfolded during literacy learning experiences in an English Language Development (ELD) classroom of students in grades 9-12. As an experienced teacher with a strong background in the theory and practice of helping students negotiate academic literacy, I investigated the theories of practice explaining how students acquire and enact literacy practices when engaged in academic discourse. With the opportunity to teach a group of immigrant and refugee students with varying backgrounds and limited English, I designed a research study investigating the use of academic discourse by these students. This study targets a much-needed gap in the research literature, and examines the nature of the discourse students and a teacher employ when engaged in literary tasks and conversations.

This ten-week study was conducted using ethnographic methods of data collection to develop deeper understandings of students' literacy practices and participation as students of literature. Data for this study included classroom observations, which were analyzed using constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and discourse analysis (Gee, 2005). The students in this study were all students for whom English was an additional language. However, academic language is no one's first language, and all students arrive in school with varying degrees of proficiency in relation to school-based academic discourses. In order for students to become literate in these discourses, Gee

(1991) says they must have “master of, or fluent control over, secondary Discourses” (p. 153); in this case, the secondary Discourse of a literary conversation.

This study further examined the conditions for engagement in a classroom designed as a cognitive apprenticeship (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Schoenbach, Greenleaf & Murphy, 2012) in order “to help students conceptualize the intellectual problem in its wholeness, to situate the intellectual problem in real world contexts and applications, and to regulate their own strategy use over the course of the problem solving activity” (Lee, 1995, p. 613).

Students’ participation, and the practices they took up in the classroom to become more independent readers and thinkers in the discipline of English, were analyzed. The literature-based curriculum of this particular ELD class offered a space for students to develop proficiencies with English, and proficiencies with techniques and approaches that could provide students access to literary discourse, allowed them to take responsibility for their own learning and reading, and to develop proficiency with the literacy demands of the discipline of English. This study addressed students’ talk in a classroom when they were given opportunities to engage with literacy tasks and in literary discussion. Throughout all of these classroom experiences, a focus on student talk was essential to examine *how* students participated.

Problem Statement

If the literate thinking practices that are seen in effective classrooms (Langer, 2001), are to be available for all students, including English Language Learners, there need to be opportunities for students to read, write, discuss and connect to content area

learning. Langer (2002) refers to these outcomes of effective classrooms as “high literacy”: “where students gain not merely the basic literacy skills to get by, but also the content knowledge, ways of structuring ideas, and ways of communicating with others that are considered the ‘marks’ of an educated person” (p. 2). Classroom practices that support this learning, and development of literacies, incorporate a wide range of instructional approaches, an expanded view of text (to include multiliteracies and variety of genres) and an examination of students’ participation in relation to these learning experiences and tools.

For English Language Learners, these practices are just as, if not more, essential: “I maintain that it is possible for second language learners to develop deep disciplinary knowledge and engage in challenging academic activities if teachers know how to support them pedagogically to achieve their potential” (Walqui, 2006, p. 159). How students engaged learning as a social practice, and students’ response to a student-centered pedagogy, where students’ voices were the center of the classroom was the focus of the classroom in this study.

Previous studies have offered recommendations for teacher practices and the relationship of these practices to students’ learning (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand & Gamoran, 2003; Langer, 2001; Nystrand, 1997); however, none of the studies fully examine the literary and literacy processes students actually use when the recommendations are put into place by teachers. The purpose of the present study is to describe the ways that students engage in the reading of a complex text when the teacher intentionally and systematically employed the recommendations in the literature. The

recommendations from the literature are consistent, but how students' take up practices in classrooms where these recommendations are put into place, hasn't been examined. The present study contributes to this literature by describing the complexity of enactment. This study was designed to provide insight as to how effective literacy practices come alive in the daily life of one classroom. This is valuable because "traditionally and historically, in the field of education in general and literacy in particular, the task of engineering workable instruction has been left mostly to practitioners, not researchers" (Reinking & Bradley, 2008, p. 8). In this study, I examined the student literacy practices that emerged when students had opportunities to engage in making meaning of complex academic text in a classroom context designed according to recommendations for teacher practice as described in the literature.

The Study

This qualitative study, using ethnographic methods of data collection and analysis, described students' participation and literacy practices through an analysis of the student talk that occurred during the enactment of classroom tasks. Through constant comparative analysis of student talk transcribed from videotaped classroom interactions, I identified themes that arose in these spaces where students were offered opportunities to engage one another as they analyzed and came to understand literary text. The purpose of this study was to investigate how students engaged these opportunities and to describe the talk that occurred.

Relevance of the Research Study

English Language Learners

English Language Learners are a rapidly growing population in American schools: "...between 1992 and 2002, the enrollment of English Language Learners (ELLs) grew by 84% while the total K-12 population grew by only 10%" (Walqui, 2006, p. 159). Cultural and linguistic diversity in the student populations offers teachers new and varied opportunities for developing pedagogies to meet the needs of these students. However, too often, a deficit way of talking about differences in student learning has dominated (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). As a result, ELLs have been confined to skill and drill English classes that focus on general vocabulary and reading skills without a focus on content or academic discourse. Language and learning scholars counter this deficit model by recommending that English language development for adolescent English Language Learners focus on language development in the context of academic classes that focus on the development of academic discourses (Au, 2006; Lee, 2007). Gutierrez and Rogoff (2003) propose examining cultural processes that students participate and engage in as a way to gain insight into these increasingly diverse populations, and this focus on participation is the lens through which I investigate the literary conversations that took place in the classroom focused on in this study.

The complexity of the context of a linguistically and culturally heterogeneous academic classroom cannot be overstated. However, very little information exists on what happens in a classroom in which a repertoire of "shared social practices" (Walqui, 2006, p. 159) are designed to support students' cognitive, linguistic, and academic

development. Research surrounding the ways that students participate in an academic context where the pedagogy was designed to position students in ways that value their thinking and their talk, can lead to additional insight into students' literacy practices. These ideas, grounded in sociocultural theories of learning, are explicated in the next chapter, but a stance of "learning as a social practice" underlies the curricular and pedagogical choices in the classroom focused on in this study. Much of the related research (See Chapter 2) surrounding literacy curriculum and instruction at the secondary level has been on what teachers do. In contrast, the purpose of this study was to take a close look at students' talk in spaces designed to promote literary conversations.

Additionally, much of the previous research surrounding culturally and linguistically diverse students focused on either elementary students or on one particular cultural or linguistic group. The participants in this study are secondary students who are immigrants and refugees from all over the world, diverse in terms of their cultures and language backgrounds. This culturally and linguistically heterogeneous secondary classroom provided an under studied context to examine students' discourse as they were asked to engage in close reading of text. The classroom context was designed to support students' metacognitive and cognitive awareness in relation to literacy within a sociocultural context, but it is the students' uptake and participation that is the focus of this study. There is a great deal to learn from students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who are reading Shakespeare and participating in literary discussions.

Language Use in the Classroom

Research on pedagogical theories and practices indicates that constructivist models of teaching can shift the power of the classroom; the question of how the language is used in the classroom, and who speaks, opens possibilities for how learning occurs. Features of language use in the classroom include: “the language of curriculum, the language of control, and the language of personal identity” (Cazden, 2001, p. 3). In many middle and high schools, the language of the curriculum is the language of control: teachers rely on lecture or the “pedagogy of telling” as the main or sole way of communicating content to students (Nystrand, 1997). Research suggests that this approach not only marginalizes the voices of students, it hinders deep understanding, and limits opportunities to for students to move toward independence in their literacy practices. This study was an examination of what *does* occur in a classroom where student voices were central, and where they were asked to engage in joint or collaborative meaning making in close reading tasks.

Studies of classroom dialogue offer up both theoretical and methodological challenges. Mercer (2008) described the challenge, but also the importance of analyzing classroom talk over time to investigate student learning: “As learning is a process that happens over time, and learning is mediated through dialogue, we need to study dialogue over time to understand how learning happens and why certain learning outcomes result” (p. 25). Lave (1996) reflected on the different foci of past research surrounding learning: “Research on learning is mostly research on ‘instruction,’ on depersonalized guidelines for the teaching of specific lesson-like things in school settings in order to improve

learning” (p. 158). The difference between my study and those that precede it is that I attempted to describe the relationship of students’ talk to the practices that occurred in the classroom. The moment-to-moment participation of students during the enactment of learning opportunities illustrated how uptake of tasks occurred. These considerations brought me to the research question, which guided my study.

The Question

I pose the following question:

- What is the role of student talk in the enactment of literary conversations and literacy practices in a classroom designed for “engaged academic literacy” (Schoenbach & Greenleaf, 2009)?

Lave (1996) says, “A close reading of research on how to improve learning shows that questions about learning are almost always met by educational researchers with investigations of *teaching* [emphasis mine]” (p. 158). If we want to examine how *students* participate in a classroom setting, then it is necessary to place focus on how students engage in a classroom context, and how they respond to the opportunities that are offered to them: “Further, if teachers teach in order to affect learning, the only way to discover whether they are having effects and if so what those are, is to explore whether, and if so how, there are changes in the participation of learners learning in their various communities of practice” (Lave, 1996, p. 158). Lave’s conceptual framework indicated that it is necessary to study the enactment of the curriculum, which is commensurate with this research study.

This study, situated within this framework of sociocultural theory, focused on how the close reading tasks occurred in situ as students grappled with complex text. In order to do this, I examined students' talk that emerged in a co-constructed community of practice: the teacher constructed the spaces for the learning to occur, developed routines for interactions among students, and invited students to participate in these spaces using these routines. Within these spaces, I studied the students' resulting participation as evidenced through their talk.

This study focused on how students, specifically a heterogeneous group of high school English language learners, participated in literary conversations, and how they took up responsibility for their own literacy practices and engaged literacy tasks in this classroom. The goal of this classroom structure was to provide students with opportunities for "engaged academic literacy" which is defined by Schoenbach and Greenleaf (2009) as "students work actively with one another, with teachers, and independently to understand challenging texts in ways that have meaning for them and that build on their knowledge, experience, creativity, and questions" (p. 100). The recommendations for classroom structures and curricula have been well documented in the research, as noted above, but there is a gap as to how secondary English language learners respond to these structures when engaging in literary conversations.

Overview of the Dissertation

This first chapter situated the reader in regards content and purpose of this study; it also provided a rationale for why this study is needed. In the following chapter, I describe the theoretical foundation for this study, and provide a review of research

literature relevant to this research. The theoretical framework views literacy as social practice, the relevant research studies are reports of investigations that use this theoretical frame to study classroom discourse, English Language Learners' literacy development, and students' literacy development.

In chapter three, I discuss the selection and rationale for the methods used in this study. I provide a description of the ethnographic methods of data collection, and how discourse analysis provided a tool for analyzing language use in a social setting. I then provide the context for the study: the students, myself as their teacher, and the school. I provide detail about the classroom setting, both the physical space and the routines that underlie the instructional design. I then provide a description of the goals of the course and the instructional supports intended to help students meet these goals. I discuss how tasks are designed in the different participation structures available to students during class. I go on to describe how I collected data, and how these data were analyzed.

The fourth chapter provides an analysis of student talk within the classroom context. This chapter reports how students negotiate the opportunities they were presented with and presents an analysis of how the student talk indicated practices that were enacted in the context of the classroom.

In chapter five, I provide a summary of the study, conclusions drawn, and outline implications for research and pedagogy describing how these implications can also impact teacher education and professional development for inservice teachers.

CHAPTER 2

THEORIES THAT INFORM AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, I describe the theories and research that provided a frame for viewing and interpreting the participants' discourse in literary conversations in this study. I reviewed related research that provided a lens for interpreting the language and literacy practices of students in the high school English classroom that is the focus of this study. Included in this chapter is an overview of research on classroom discourse and literacy development. This research, which illustrates the ways in which sociocultural theory has been described in the literature, explores curricular and instructional approaches, and the presence of students' talk in the classroom.

Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theories of language and learning provide the basis for this study. Literacy, specifically academic literacy, has been conceptualized in multiple ways, stemming from multiple theoretical premises. There have been past emphases on cognitive literacy processes, linguistic processes, and social perspectives on learning. However, "it has become common among literacy researchers to describe the distinct ways of reading and writing and communicating among different groups as 'social practices'" (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007, p. 7). The basic premise of this theory is that all learning is social and that learning happens through language interactions with others. Sociocultural theory views "human action as mediated by language and other symbol systems within particular cultural contexts" (Lewis, Enciso & Moje, 2007, p. 4).

Vygotsky's (1978) theories, represented in his seminal text *Mind in Society*, extended earlier psychological definitions of mediation to include language as well as other tools, and were a major influence in articulating sociocultural perspectives on learning. This theory, which focuses on the use of language as a tool for learning within social settings, has been particularly informative for researchers who study these practices in classrooms (Wells, 1999).

Sociocultural theory, based heavily on Vygotsky's (1978) theories of learning, includes social interaction as the basis for learning and development, and defines learning as "a process of apprenticeship and internalization in which skills and knowledge are transformed from the social into the cognitive plane" (Walqui, 2006, p. 160). Vygotsky's articulation of sociocultural theory argued that learners actively construct knowledge through social interactions, rather than as individuals (Mercer, 1995). Because of this, the research conducted for this study focused on students' collaborative conversations about literature, rather than their individual responses to literature. Analysis of students' social interactions surrounding a literary text provided insight into how they were participating within the classroom context, and in these participation structures. Vygotsky's theories influenced the research in this study and informed the data collected and analyzed for this study, which focused on students' practices within this situated learning environment.

Two additional theories consistent with the sociocultural framework include Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of a "community of practice," and Bakhtin's (1981) theories of language use, particularly dialogism and heteroglossia.

Communities of Practice

Lave and Wenger 's (1991) articulation of the concept of a “community of practice” emphasizes the role of apprenticeship in social contexts. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), an environment designed for learning “is essentially situated. It is not something that can be considered in isolation, manipulated in arbitrary didactic terms, or analyzed apart from the social relations that shape legitimate peripheral participation” (p. 96). Lave and Wenger (1991) conceptualized learning as “an aspect of changing participation in changing ‘communities of practice’ everywhere” (Lave, 1996, p. 150). Lave (1996) underscores the importance of this for learning and learners: “Theories that reduce learning to individual mental capacity/activity in the last instance blame marginalized people for being marginal...A reconsideration of learning as social, collective, rather than individual, psychological phenomenon offers the only way beyond the current state of affairs that I can envision at the present time” (p. 149).

Lave and Wenger (1991) explained, “apprenticeship opportunities for learning are, more often than not, given structure by work practices instead of by strongly asymmetrical master-apprentice relations” (p. 93). For example, in a classroom, the structure of tasks, and the scaffolding in the routines, apprentice students to the ways of thinking and talking and being in the discipline (academic context of the class). According to Lave and Wenger (1991), this environment designed for learning “is essentially situated. It is not something that can be considered in isolation, manipulated in arbitrary didactic terms, or analyzed apart from the social relations that shape legitimate peripheral participation” (p. 96). The idea of “practice” as defined by Wenger

(1998), is inherently social and dependent on context: “The concept of practice connotes doing, but not just doing in and of itself. It is doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do. In this sense, practice is always social practice” (p. 47). It is through this practice that people “move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29), and they become more proficient members of a community. Lave and Wenger’s (1991) conception of learning addresses the importance of the social world of learning, and “legitimate peripheral participation refers both to the development of knowledgeably skilled identities in practice and to the reproduction and transformation of communities of practice” (p. 55). This theory places learning directly in relation to the identities and the participation of the learners within the community. The participants, according to this theory, must be engaged in the ongoing activity that allows for shifts and changes in participation. Additionally, this theoretical framing ties back into Vygotsky’s (1978) views on apprenticeship and the Zone of Proximal Development as an essential part of how this knowledge is transferred in an instructional setting, and through social use of language. I used this notion of a community of practice to gain an understanding of how students’ participation in a classroom community influenced the literacy practices they employed and their willingness to engage in the discourse of the community.

Theories of Language Use in Learning

Bakhtin also contributed to the development of theories of language use, arguing the importance for constructing spaces for discourse and engagement in social contexts. Within this theoretical frame, conversations require what Bakhtin (1981) referred to as

dialogic conversation. In *The Dialogic Imagination* Bakhtin (1981) outlined these theories of socio-ideological language use. He asserted that individuals take up different roles that get played out in different social situations, and conceptualized these conversations as part of the development of epistemological understandings as opportunities for students to engage in “struggling with another’s discourse, its influence in history of an individual’s coming to ideological consciousness” (p. 348). Bakhtin (1984) contrasts monologic and dialogic discourse: “monologism” pretends to *possess a ready-made truth*” (p. 110), whereas dialogic discourse allows participants voices to “refract” one another’s. This dialogue is necessarily complex, and describes language as varying according to contexts. Participants are able to share ideas, expand ideas, and react to and modify the ideas of others. Monologism identifies meaning from a singular perspective: “Monologue pretends to be the *ultimate* word. It closes down the represented world and represented persons” (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 292-293). On the other hand, dialogic processes leave space for authentic questions, for making meaning collaboratively, and for active participation in knowledge construction, which include: “a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices,” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6). This view of language use and dialogic processes informs the research for this study in that I have examined how these “plurality of independent voices” were related to students’ participation in literary conversations.

In a classroom setting, dialogism allows space for students’ voices along with the teacher’s: “in monologically organized instruction, the textbook and teachers’ voice are the main voices, whereas in dialogically organized instruction, teachers make some

public space for unofficial student voices; consequently, the discourse is more balanced so that the teacher's voice is but one voice among many" (Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser & Long, 2003, p. 15). In a student-centered classroom, these conversations make up the discourse of the classroom. Without these processes in place, the individual participant in the discourse of the context can be marginalized by the dominant discourse; this plurality of voices, referred to Bakhtin as "heteroglossia" (1981), is "the fundamental condition within which meaning is constructed" (Landay, 2004, p. 110). In a classroom where either the teacher's voice of authority or the students' voice is excluded, this instructional dialogue cannot occur: "both relativism and dogmatism equally exclude all argumentation, all authentic dialogue, by making it either unnecessary (relativism) or impossible (dogmatism)" (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. viii). Opportunities for authentic dialogue, without a predetermined answer, allow for a plurality of voices, and, in theories set out above, a space where students' voices are not excluded. The instructional design of the classroom where this study took place provided for student voice and for authentic dialogue.

Review of Related Literature

The studies outlined in this section demonstrate how sociocultural theory has been the theoretical frame for research on literacy instruction and engagement of adolescent learners. These studies investigated particular instructional practices and the role of texts, tasks, and discussion practices in literacy learning. The findings from these studies imply practical implications for curricular decisions, instructional design, and language use in the classroom to support students' literacy practices. Within these different aspects of

literacy practices that have been studied, I reveal gaps in the literature and explain the ways in which my research contributes to the literature.

The Role of Curriculum and Instruction

Recommendations made by the National Council of Teachers of English (2004) called for a vision of adolescent literacy that included “sustained experiences with diverse texts in a variety of genres” and “conversations/ discussions regarding texts that are authentic” (p. 2). These recommendations make clear that opportunities for students’ talk are an integral part of effective instruction. This interrelationship between the spaces for students’ voices, and the academic practices that students engage in is also highlighted in the work of Schoenbach and colleagues (2012): “When the learning environment is carefully constructed to promote social collaboration and make explicit connections between literacy proficiencies and students’ assets and aspirations, students’ social and personal concerns can serve the academic goals their teachers hold for them” (Schoenbach, Greenleaf, & Murphy, 2012, p. 13). Studies that have examined the role of instructional design that supports social climate and oral interactions in the classroom have been conducted within the framework of sociocultural theory. These studies all take into consideration the role of the social context for learning, how this context might be developed, and how it affects student learning. Each of these studies situated literacy learning in a social context.

Effective instructional and curricular approaches for supporting students’ literary discourse have been examined in multiple studies (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand & Gamoran, 2003; Langer, 2001). Langer’s (2001) “Beating the Odds” research identified

“characteristics of instruction that accompany student achievement in reading, writing, and English” (p. 837) to include high level literacy activities, as well as reading, writing, and discussion activities that supported “minds-on” (highly engaged experiences with content) opportunities and classroom participation. This large-scale nested multi-case study examined the practices of 44 teachers in 25 schools over the course of two years. Findings indicated that effective classrooms included those where “students not only worked together in physical proximity, but they gained skill in sharing ideas, reacting to each other, testing out ideas and arguments, and contributing to the intellectual tenor of the class” (p. 872). Langer’s focus was on the practices that teachers engaged in to support students’ literacy learning. Applebee, Langer, Nystrand and Gamoran (2003) extended this previous work by focusing on the role of classroom discussion and students’ literacy performance. These researchers examined commonalities in the literature and whether students’ in classrooms where these recommended practices occurred improved their literacy performance. Their study included 64 classes and a total of 1,412 students. Two lessons were observed in each classroom at the beginning of the school year and two lessons were observed during the spring semester. Additional measures included a questionnaire completed by students and teachers and three common performance tasks administered to students over the course of the year. The quantitative analysis of students’ performance on these tasks included an analysis of the principal variables: dialogic instruction, envisionment building, extended curricular conversations and high academic demands to determine the relationship of students’ performance to these variables. A principal components analysis was conducted to

determine interrelationships between variables. Their findings indicated that among these interrelationships was a correlation between classroom discussion and the students' achievement on the performance task administered in the spring: "We found that high academic demands and discussion-based approaches were significantly related to spring performance" (Applebee et al, 2003, p. 719). Their focus on "dialogic discussion, environment-building activities, extended curricular conversations" (p. 693) instead of specific discussion strategies or techniques for structuring discussions" provided evidence that creating effective spaces for discussion and engagement was related to how participation structures and tasks were designed.

These studies (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand & Gamoran, 2003; Langer, 2001) provided an overview of factors that made for high-quality literacy instruction, but did not provide guidance for how these practices could be enacted, nor did they provide insight into how specific students, such as ELLs, might take up these practices in a classroom. My study attempted to shed light on students' responses to these practices by investigating what it looked and sounded like when students participated in a classroom when they shared ideas, made meaning of text together, and engaged in dialogic conversation. By closely examining how students engaged in the close reading process and discourse, additional insight into ways to support this engagement might emerge. By constructing a context in which student voices and ideas were central to the learning, my research was planned to provide a close look at how students participated in classroom culture when it was set up according to these recommendations for effective literacy learning.

Recommendations for curricular design and instructional approaches were also examined in Carol Lee's (1995, 2007) studies of the implementation of her cultural modeling curriculum. Lee's studies also examined effective classroom practices, specifically how curricular decisions and instructional practices were designed to meet the needs of urban African-American students. Lee (2007) drew on the communities of practice model, which is based on Lave and Wenger's (1991) scholarship, as she examined what effective learning processes (and scaffolds for these learning processes) could be. Lee's cultural modeling curriculum was developed based on findings from a mixed-methods study of six urban high school classes. Lee examined the needs of students to develop awareness and connections to tasks they were asked to complete, as well as ways to use current knowledge, discourse practices, interests, and identity to scaffold participation in academic discourse, particularly in evidence-based argumentation using multiple texts provided in the curriculum.

Lee's (2007) understandings of the enactment of the curriculum she created and studied also foregrounded the importance of schools and classrooms as safe spaces where "students understand what they are to do, see the work of schooling as relevant to some goals, are able to develop meaningful goals they could not achieve on their own, and are willing to take risks to learn tasks that are difficult" (p. 31). Lee articulated these spaces as ones where students have opportunities to negotiate success and where the instructional practices value the process of learning instead of the outcomes for what is learned. However, Lee's studies were conducted in homogeneous cultural spaces where culturally relevant discourse patterns and texts were the ones that students were

encouraged to make connections to as they engaged in academic literacy practices. These scaffolds, although highly appropriate for the cultural context Lee studied, are not readily transferrable to heterogeneous classrooms, nor do they necessarily address the full spectrum of voices in U.S. schools today. However, the curriculum and approaches provided possibilities for different ways that the dominant discourse could be disrupted, and how students' who have not been traditionally successful in school might find pathways through their own "internally persuasive discourse" (Bakhtin, 1981) to access official authoritative discourses

Lee developed classroom routines that created spaces for both social and academic pursuits, and also provided spaces so that we "can socialize students into becoming more disposed to persist in the face of difficulty or uncertainty" (Lee, 2007, p. 3). All of these elements of the curricular design were supports for students to grow in both confidence and competence with academic discourse, particularly literary analysis. However, Lee's study did not address students' opportunities to engage text and make meaning (collaboratively and independently). The competencies the students in these studies inhabited and developed did not explicitly include opportunities to engage text and make meaning through close reading except in full-group settings. The onus of the responsibility for learning in these classes was placed more heavily on the curriculum and the teacher than on the students' uptake of this design. Small group work was said to have occurred, but no report of small group interaction was included; the report provided only a view of full group, teacher-led conversations. Lee's classroom context offered spaces for conversation and cultural connections, and multiple opportunities to engage

with texts that provided scaffolds to more complex texts, but the task of reading complex text closely and developing skill and proficiency was not addressed in the description of the enactment and the report of the findings. Relying on curriculum alone, even when the curriculum is designed to meet the needs of a particular group of students presents a challenge in that it does not allow insight into the level of flexibility required by a truly responsive classroom. It is not to say this is a deficit in Lee's research, only something that was not addressed.

In contrast, the present study focused on instances that included students' meaning-making processes and opportunities for independent meaning-making as they engaged in close reading of text. The text selected for my study (*Julius Caesar*) was not explicitly chosen to mirror students' backgrounds, which was one of Lee's recommendations, but I focused on the students' response to instructional practices instead. *Julius Caesar* did provide a vehicle for discussing overarching themes we had explored in the class (justice, in particular) and, because it was a traditionally taught 10th grade text in the mainstream English classes at this school (and many others across the nation), it provided students with an opportunity to engage a text that they might not otherwise have access to because they were in the ELD track.

The question that I continued to ask while reading these studies was how the students participated within the classroom as they were making meaning of the texts the curriculum was offering them. Thus, the focus of my study is how students took up opportunities presented within the curriculum and instructional design as they engaged in close reading of complex text. In other words, the present study examined how students,

in an intentionally designed learning environment, in a specific classroom context, with particular participation structures and supports, engaged in the task of making meaning of text and conducting literary discussion, particularly when the onus of the intellectual work was placed on the students.

In a traditional classroom, students are most often the passive recipients of information, whereas in an “intentional learning environment” (Brown, 1989), the learning is based on the monitoring of progress of students and the practice of active inquiry: “[teachers] teach on a need-to-know basis responsive to students’ needs, rather than on a fixed scope and sequence schedule, or according to an inflexible lesson plan” (Brown, 1989, p. 150). When classroom interventions rely too heavily on curriculum, without considering the intricacies of how the curriculum is enacted and what moment-to-moment adjustments need to be made, the complexities of classroom interactions may be overlooked by those employing the interventions.

Recommended instructional approaches and curricular designs that support English language learners in participating in literary discussion are also found in the literature. Research findings and implications regarding general adolescent literacy and the needs of English language learners, particularly in conjunction with the importance of social processes of meaning making and language use, overlap and share many of the same implications (Ivey & Broaddus, 2007). Ivey and Broaddus (2007) stated, “effective instruction likely emanates from interesting content and concepts rather than from a focus on low-level language skills” (p. 519). Their formative design study was conducted to examine how English Language Learners’ engagement with text can be supported by

independent choice of text selection. This study shed light on students' development of personal reading identities, and ownership of their choices for texts, and how personal choice can support students' engagement and development of positive reading identities. However, students in secondary school are most often expected to engage core texts in the curriculum, which are often complex and academically challenging, in addition to texts that they choose themselves. Ivey and Broaddus did not discuss how students engage with core texts in the curriculum, nor did they intend to, and this remains a gap in the literature. As in Lee's (2007) study, Ivey and Broaddus (2007) relied on curricular interventions as a way of promoting students' engagement, as opposed to studying the ways students took up instructional practices, whereas my study focused on the practices that emerged as students took up core literacy tasks in the classroom in more self-directed ways.

The Role of Discourse

The role of discourse, particularly opportunities for discussion, in the secondary classroom is one that is acknowledged to be a powerful tool for both learning and student engagement (Alvermann & Hayes, 1989; Eeds, 1989; Langer, 2001). Additionally, research on classroom discourse "recognizes the reflexive relationship noted by Fairclough (1989), Gutierrez and Garcia (1989), and others; that is, that classroom contexts—including the academic work that is done there and the beliefs and values exhibited—permit and are also constituted by the discourse therein" (Edelsky, Smith & Wolfe, 2002, p. 1). These theories and the corresponding research, indicate that the role of discourse in classrooms has an effect on both how classroom tasks are enacted, and

how students' engagement occurs. The research illustrates the role of discussion in helping students develop, refine, and create understanding of ideas and concepts in the disciplines of school. The recommendation to incorporate discussion as a classroom practice to support students' literacy development has been well documented in the literature (Almasi, O'Flavin & Arya, 2001; Alvermann and Hayes, 1989; Fall, Webb & Chudowsky, 2000). These studies drew on Bakhtin's (1981) theoretical understandings of discourse, which makes the case for disrupting traditional teacher-led patterns of discussion, when possible, and allowing spaces for students to engage in scaffolded teacher-student or student-student talk in an academic context.

Patterns of classroom talk were examined in Alvermann and Hayes' (1989) intervention study of classroom discussion, which examined discussions of the assigned readings in content-area classrooms in five classrooms, and the teachers' approach to discussion in each of these classrooms over time. The questions that guided their study inquired into existing patterns of classroom discussion, how these are related to references teachers and students make to text, and how teachers and researchers might work together to modify patterns of classroom discussion. The researchers documented existing patterns of classroom discussion, and through ongoing collaboration with teachers, examined whether these patterns could be modified. Their intervention included a conference between the classroom teacher and the researcher assigned to the particular classroom, classroom observation, an analysis of the lesson by the researcher, then a planning conference during which the teacher and researcher met together to plan the next lesson according to suggestions made by the researcher. Lastly, the researchers

conducted an analysis of the intervention. The researchers examined whether the changes in patterns in the classroom discourse were related to any of the references students and teachers made to text. The primary data sources for their study were videotaped classroom discussions and transcripts from planning conferences with teachers. The videotaped classroom events were transcribed and coded for both “discrete functions of classroom speech and discrete levels of references to texts” (Alvermann & Hayes, 1989, p. 310). Representative segments of coded transcripts from the beginning of the intervention, the middle and at the end were selected. Through these segments, the researchers were able to identify patterns of discussion and references to text in the classrooms. The findings included case studies of five teachers’ classroom practice and planning conferences and indicated that modifications in the “teachers’ and students’ verbal exchange patterns were mostly unsuccessful” (Alvermann & Hayes, 1989, p. 331). The two possible reasons the researchers provided for why these interventions may have been unsuccessful included teachers’ own practical reasons for not implementing recommended strategies, and the complexity of classroom contexts. My study extends this research by examining how students’ take up discussion practices in a classroom in which the norms for communication encourage students’ contributions to classroom discourse from the beginning of the year.

Students’ contributions to classroom discourse in small group conversations were examined in Eeds’ and Wells’ (1989) study of elementary students’ discussion of literature. In their study, 17 pre-service teachers participated as group leaders in small group literature conversations with fourth and fifth grade students. The purpose of the

study was “to explore what happened when children and teachers gathered to talk about a work they had read” (p. 6). The researchers collected and transcribed the groups’ audiotaped discussions that occurred for 30 minutes each day, two days per week, for a total of five to seven taped conversations per group. The dialogue was analyzed for both the number and types of utterances that occurred. The researchers noted patterns that emerged in the questions and responses by teachers and students. The focus of this study was to see if students engaged in literary conversations as a natural part of the talk in their collaborative groups. Commonalities that emerged across groups included: constructing simple meaning, sharing personal stories, sharing in active inquiry, and evaluating the text. Findings suggested that when teachers become “not authorities on meaning, explicators of text, or sources of answers, but simply other readers with whom to talk, then grand conversations about literature may indeed be possible” (Eeds & Wells, 1989, p. 28). Eeds’ and Wells’ study provided insight into possibilities for teacher-led student discussions, and the implications are informative as students continue to move toward independence. Limitations of this study include the fact that the study was conducted with a teacher participant as a regular part of each group for the full length of each discussion, who served as a group leader. Their study does not provide insight into what students do when engaged in reading and meaning making without an adult leader present, but because the leaders were not asked to teach, only to help guide the dialogue, the conversations that emerged provided illustrations of a variety of ways students engage in literary discussions. Also, their study is about 5th and 6th graders discussing self-

selected literature; hence, the question remains as to how students discuss assigned, discipline-oriented complex text.

How classroom discourse was organized in a classroom was also the focus of Edelsky, Smith and Wolfe (2002) who focused on teachers' discourse in a classroom context. Their study of one elementary school classroom focused on videotaped small group "literature study" discussions, focusing on the teacher's discursive practices, examined the "connections between belief-inspired academic work and academic discourse" (Edelsky, Smith & Wolfe, 2002, p. 10). They examined the ways in which the teacher's discourse was related to the academic work that occurred in her classroom. Characteristics of the teacher talk as enacted during the small group conversations served various purposes and the researchers identified specific teacher moves that occurred as patterns throughout the classroom. Their findings indicated that the teacher's discourse patterns were aligned with her beliefs about learning and the specific learners in her classroom. This study provided a focused analysis of teacher talk in an apprenticeship model of learning in an elementary classroom. The present study is different in that it focuses on secondary students. Also, as the teacher in the classroom, my beliefs about teaching and learning are consistent with the apprenticeship model. By looking closely at how students' engaged in discourse and enacted the tasks assigned to them in the context of a theoretically consistent apprenticeship classroom, we can learn more about how the discourse of the classroom is shaped by and shapes students' practices during these conversations.

The effect of opportunities for collaboration and discussion on students' performance has also been studied. Students' cognitive processes and performances on group assessment tasks were the focus of Fall, Webb and Chudowsky's (2000) study. Their study focused on 10th grade students' performance on a pilot assessment that measured their responses to open-ended questions regarding three different short stories "to determine the impact of collaboration on the nature of students' changes in understanding of a piece of literature and on their performance" (p. 916). They studied test responses for 125 tenth-grade students. They varied the timing and opportunity for collaboration. One group participated in a discussion at the beginning of the test, one toward the end of the test, and the other participated in no discussion at all. In each case where collaboration occurred, students read individually for 20 minutes, and were offered a chance to discuss the text for ten minutes before individually responding to questions. Students' responses were coded according to "factual knowledge, understanding of characters' feelings and motives and the story's theme, evidence of an effect of group discussion, and self-reported change in understanding as a result of the group discussion (Fall, Webb & Chudowsky, 2000, p. 921). Inter-rater reliability of the four coders was significantly high, and all analyses were carried out twice. The results of this quantitative study indicated: "even a small amount of collaboration can have significant influences on students' understanding of the material" (Fall, Webb & Chudowsky, 2000, p. 936). In their study, the discussions themselves were not highly structured, nor did the groups have norms built in to their collaboration (because they were not always familiar with one another), however, the evidence of change in students' understandings of the facts of the

story was the most prevalent. One of the most interesting pieces in this study was the fact that often students' self-reports said there was no change in their understanding, whereas their responses indicated that there was. The authors state, in response to this fact, "group discussion can have beneficial effects on a student's understanding even when the student does not recognize it" (p. 936). This study makes an interesting case for the importance of discussion, but also suggests that purpose and developing procedures for effective literary conversations might add to the effectiveness of discussions:

"Challenges for future research are to document the processes that occur when students to collaborate to understand pieces of literature..." (p. 937). Fall, Webb, and Chudowsky's (2000) study did not provide a classroom example, as the intervention was not a part of students' normal classroom experiences, but it did provide insight on how the discussions supported students' meaning making. The findings indicated that students were able to clarify "basic facts" from the first part of the test that led them to deeper understandings during the second part of the assessment. For example, students moved from "Too many words I didn't understand. The whole story was confusing" to "I think she did change because..." (p. 930). Based on their results, the authors' concluded that even small amounts of collaborative group work supported students' understanding. Implications for continuing to study how these small group collaborations are enacted in classrooms, what they sounded like, and how students engaged in meaning making within these collaborative groups is an area of study that needs more attention in the research.

Because their study was not a natural part of a classroom, there remain questions about the role of classroom discussion in ongoing classroom practice. The challenge that these

researchers noted, of the documentation of what students do to make meaning of literature, is one that I have taken up in my own study.

Opportunities to participate in classroom discourse have also been shown to have effects for English language learners. In a case study of 12 bilingual fifth-grade students (Langer, Bartolome, Vasquez & Lucas, 1990), researchers analyzed the factors that impacted the ways students constructed meaning in school literacy tasks in both Spanish and English. Their findings indicated that students' abilities to use good meaning-making strategies affected their ability to participate in and see themselves as members of the discourse more than their fluency with the language. Langer, Bartolome, Vasquez and Lucas's (1990) findings added to the literature regarding the role of classroom discourse and literacy learning for bilingual students and indicated that when students were asked more open-ended questions, they communicated what they learned more clearly and thoroughly than when they were asked factual questions with only one correct answer. Because these skills were best supported in ways that are not generally seen in traditional instructional materials or tests, the case was made for a more rigorous and print-rich setting, as well as more authentic questions for students to respond to during their reading process. According to Langer et al's (1990) study, allowing students the space to communicate what they know, and what knowledge they are bringing to bear as they make meaning of academic texts can support students' meaning making. This study provided a close examination of how elementary students engaged text, but we do not know as much about how secondary students respond to similar learning experiences. My study provided additional insight into how secondary ELL students asked and

answered questions as part of their collaborative classroom discourse. My study looked at how students engaged literary academic tasks to begin to identify the practices that students used for literary discussion.

Throughout all of these studies, one of the most consistent findings is that a student-centered classroom, particularly one that includes dialogic conversation, leads to greater engagement and understanding of ideas and texts for students (Almasi, O'Flavin & Arya, 2001; Alvermann, 2001; Ivey & Fisher, 2006). Almasi, O'Flavin and Arya's (2001) study was guided by three questions that inquired into the practices of more and less proficient peer discussions were enacted. Their study concentrated on the practices of forty-nine fourth graders in six different classrooms. Data sources included videotapes of the weekly discussions in each of the six different groups studied. In first levels of analysis, the researchers identified levels of proficiency among the groups and then began to identify characteristics that indicated proficiency. They found that the more proficient groups were able to sustain topics longer than the less proficient groups, and that they were able to make links to other topics being discussed more fluidly. Their conclusions focused on the fact that responsibility must be gradually relinquished to students in order for them to make progress in their learning and literacy development: "By failing to give students the opportunity to monitor their own discussion, teachers may hinder students' ability to operate in the group independent of the teacher" (p. 118). Their study provided insight into the types of topics students engage and discuss when provided the opportunity to do so, but did not investigate the literate practices that students engaged to make meaning of the texts they were reading. My study extended the research in this area

to explore ways in which students, in particular English Language Learners, engaged in classroom discourse as they were making meaning of text, and what practices were enacted during these events.

The importance of attending to these interactions between students as they make meaning of text were underscored in Nystrand's (1997) quantitative analysis of the role of discussion in student learning: "In none of our analyses did we ever find that a higher cognitive level of instructional activities actually enhanced learning. Instead, we could explain the relative effectiveness of different instructional practices only when we examined the ways teachers and students interacted as evidenced by authentic questions, uptake, and especially discussion" (p. 57). Nystrand's work examined the types of talk that students engaged in in full group conversations, facilitated by teachers. My study extended this research by considering how students' participation and discussion indicated how they were engaging with one another and the text in student-directed conversations.

Patterns of interaction, particularly the role of questioning (both by teachers and students) plays a large part in students' participation in and the enactment of literary conversations (Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser & Long, 2003) as indicated by Nystrand and colleagues' comprehensive quantitative study, which extended their previous research on classroom discourse. Their study examined patterns of interactions between teachers and students, coupled with a discourse analysis of the effects of classroom factors on students' willingness to participate included teachers "actively welcoming and soliciting student ideas by following up their responses, and opening the floor to students

by asking questions that do not have predetermined answers” (p. 187). In this way, the space created for students to participate in ways that allowed them to engage the discourse, was determined by the stance of the teacher and the structure of classroom conversation.

The limited research on how classroom discussion is facilitated in “low track” classrooms was highlighted in Nystrand’s (1997) findings which indicated that in low-track classrooms, “authentic” questions were used very differently than in “high track” classrooms: “In high track classrooms 68% of authentic questions concerned literature...25% in low-track classes” (Nystrand, 1997, p. 58). This was an important consideration in the design of the present study. The students I taught would be classified as “low track,” and the context for the study provided an examination of a research context that was not represented in the literature.

Applebee, Langer, Nystrand and Gamoran’s (2003) multi-case, multi-state study of effects of discussion-based approaches for learning indicated: “The positive results we obtained suggest that the spontaneous scaffolding or support for developing ideas that are generated during open discussions is a powerful tool for learning” (p. 722). In their study, a clear pedagogical recommendation was made, and the “tool” was described, but the ways in which this recommendation and the “tools” necessary for embedding the practice in a classroom were not explicated. Here is another example of research providing recommendations for instruction, but not providing insight into *how* teachers can employ these tools. What they did find, however, was that the recommended practices they wanted to see were not occurring often in the classrooms they studied.

Classrooms where effective discussion practices occurred are underrepresented in the literature on English Language Learners. However, for students learning English as an additional language, these discussion practices have been found to be particularly powerful (Valdes, 1998, 2004). Research does not indicate that these practices cannot occur in lower track classrooms, instead, it indicates that there is little evidence of it in practice (for a variety of reasons). I argue that this is not necessarily because it cannot happen, but because spaces in which it is occurring have not been studied. My study provides insight into how students engage discussion in a “lower track” classroom when they are provided opportunities to do so.

One study that does provide insight into the literacy practices in a similar research context to mine is Helmar-Salaso’s (2002) study of effective literacy instruction for English Language Learners, which echoed the findings of Applebee et al (2003): “Very little authentic talk occurs in the run-of-the-mill ESL class, at any level” (p. 121). This, however, is not to say that there are *not* ESL classes that are not “run-of-the-mill;” these classrooms are simply rare. For example, Helmar-Salaso’s (2002) case study of effective literacy practices in an urban high school for newcomers, and her description of an English Language Development classroom identified authentic talk as central to this high quality literacy instruction: “Student talk is an inherent and natural part of learning—the glue that holds everything else together (reading, writing, and thinking)” (p. 121). In the classroom in her case study, opportunities for student talk occurred, and there was support for student voices. As in Helmar-Salaso’s (2002) study, the

classroom context for this dissertation study is not an anomaly, but it is a context (that of a “lower-track” classroom) that has been underrepresented in the literature.

The importance of the role of peer conversations, specifically for ELLs, was underscored by Valdes’ (2004) critique and analysis of the policies and dialogue surrounding curricular and instructional requirements for English Language Learners: “Students [ELLs] must be encouraged as having something to say, as taking part in a dialogue with teachers, with students in their classroom...” (p. 88). Valdes asserts that teachers must see the value in creating spaces for students to have these conversations: “We must find ways of giving them resources and tools to use in multiple discourse communities and communication spheres, while helping them to value their own voices” (Valdes, 2004, p. 90). Without this access to resources and tools, students will not have opportunities to participate fully in the classroom and engage in the literacy learning practices available in the classroom context. Classroom cultures where students are provided with opportunities to become involved in the interactions that develop the classroom culture are seen to be more successful (Cazden, 2001). Lewis (2001) provided a rich description of elementary students engaged in literature discussions. She, too, took a “performative view of self and context [that] coincides with Bakhtin’s (1981) argument that what may appear to be an individual utterance is constituted in social interaction” (p. 13). The focus was on the social interactions of the students, as they discussed literature and made meaning of text. A research agenda that analyzes the practices secondary students engage when they have a voice in the classroom is needed to provide additional insight into how students might participate in the discourse community of the classroom.

These consistent recommendations for an academically rigorous and language-rich approach to literacy development were also described in Walqui's (2006) conceptual framework of effective teaching practices for English Language Learners: "I maintain that it is possible for second language learners to develop deep disciplinary knowledge and engage in challenging academic activities if teachers know how to support them pedagogically to achieve their potential" (p. 159). These pedagogical recommendations, built on the premise of shared social practices, once again acknowledged that the social and cognitive "go hand in hand in classroom learning" (Walqui, 2006, p. 159).

Conclusion

The related research, and the conceptual developments surrounding classroom literacy practices, have both demonstrated and explored issues related to the theoretical frame I outlined here. The theoretical framing for this study articulates the social nature of learning (Vygotsky, 1978) and the learning communities that provide for the social context in which this learning occurs (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Bakhtin's theories of language use help to explain how language occurs in a social context.

The literature review discussed in this chapter revealed several gaps in the literature. One such gap is the "often lamented gap between research and practice" (Reinking & Bradley, 2008, p. 3). Rex and Schiller (2009) add, "The researchers have been helpful in telling us what to do, but not so good at explaining how to do it" (p. 8). The present study examined students' participation in a very situated way. The enactment of secondary ELLs' literacy practices in the context of a classroom designed to

provide opportunities for close reading of text in conjunction with literary conversations needs investigation.

A second gap in the literature is that although studies of the role of curriculum and instruction have provided some excellent recommendations for how teachers might design their classrooms, they have not explored how students participate in classrooms where these recommendations are enacted. These recommendations for social collaboration and opportunities for discussion can be further explored through a close examination of students' participation in classrooms where these recommendations have been put into place. This teacher-centered focus of the literature provides a launching place for studies like mine, which examined how students take up the practices that teachers design spaces for. There have also been studies, like Lee's (1995, 2007) Cultural Modeling studies, that have focused on the power of particular curricular decisions to support students' learning. However, Lee's (1995, 2007) study does not provide clear recommendations for how teachers can support students in doing the intellectual work of close reading for themselves. Langer et al (1990) provided similar recommendations for instructional and curricular design that could support students' literacy learning. Once again, however, these studies did not focus on how these design principles were taken up by students.

A third gap in the literature is that the research on the role of language in the classroom has been approached primarily with a focus on recommendations for teachers, and the analysis of teacher's framing of literary conversations, with very little examination (if any) of how students enact the literary conversations in ways that support

their meaning making and growth toward independence. For example, Fall, Webb, and Chudowsky's (2000) quantitative study, which examined how students' responses to questions about literature were affected by opportunities for discussion, provided insight into the importance of discussion for students' understanding, but did not examine how this meaning making occurred. Applebee, Langer, Nystrand and Gamoran (2003) examined teacher practices that supported students' literacy practices, including the role of discussion, but did not provide insights into how students engaged in these discussions.

Overall, it is clear in the research that classroom discussion is important; what has not been addressed is how these discussions occur, and what practices students engage during these literary conversations. Recommendations that surface throughout the literature indicate that there needs to be a closer examination of what happens in classrooms when these recommendations are followed. In order for teaching and learning to look and sound differently than it has in the majority of secondary classrooms, there needs to be more detailed pictures in the research of how these recommendations might look in less than "perfect" or "ideal" settings. In addition, it is necessary to begin to look at how students engage in classroom settings that are designed as the research has recommended. Additionally, this body of literature on classroom discussion provided no examples that looked at what secondary students in traditionally lower-track classrooms did and said when offered opportunities to engage texts and tasks in the ways recommended by literacy researchers. My research adds to the literature by providing the field a look

at the literacy practices students engaged in when offered opportunities to discuss complex literature and participate in literary discussions as recommended in these literacy studies.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The literature discussed in the previous chapter leads to the research question investigated in this study. The research question is: What is the role of student talk in the enactment of literary conversations and literacy practices in a classroom designed for “engaged academic literacy” (Schoenbach & Greenleaf, 2009)?

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the setting and participants for this study, data collection, and the methods used for analysis of the data. I begin with a rationale for the methods used and elaborate on the question asked. I then describe the participants and the context of the study: the students, the teacher, the school, the classroom space, and the curricular and instructional routines. Next, I describe the methods for data collection and analysis of the data. Using an ethnographic approach toward data collection and analysis, I tell the story of students’ literary experiences and participation in one classroom in their school day, over a period of ten weeks. This focus allowed me to examine the enactment of literacy learning practices over a period of time. This study adds to the research by offering additional insight into how literacy-learning practices are enacted over time and in relation to a complex text.

Rationale for the Methods

A qualitative case study approach (Merriam, 1998) was used to examine students’ literary participation in the classroom. Videotaped classroom observations and corresponding reflective memos provided the central data sources for this study. Close

observation of students' talk and interactions provided insight into participation structures in the classroom. I drew on Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia because I was interested in how students' talk provided a central piece of data for understanding their participation. I was also interested in how their voices refracted one another within the classroom community. Because research indicates that these opportunities to participate in the discourse community increase student literacy proficiency (Cazden, 2001; Rex & Schiller, 2009), I examined how students participated in the opportunities for classroom discourse as they engaged in literacy tasks that were provided for them. It was important to take a close look at student talk in the classroom setting and the social interaction surrounding students' talk. This research contributes to the sociocultural perspective on language use by focusing on the dialogue that occurred in relation to the literacy tasks in which students were participating. Previous pilot studies (Garbe, 2010) investigated students' participation in classroom discourse and indicated that a closer look at how students chose to participate was needed for better understanding of classroom structures and instructional designs that do or do not support students' participation.

In my study, I examined situated language in a social setting. Discourse analysis (Gee, 2005; Goffman, 1967) provided an analytical tool for the students' conversations within the classroom. Discourse analysis positions language as central to the classroom, and allowed me to analyze the text and talk within various literacy events (Florio-Ruane & Morrell, 2004) that occurred in classroom video data. I looked for patterns that described how language use and participation in discourse was enacted. Gee (2001)

argues: “reading and writing cannot be separated from speaking, listening, and interacting, on the one hand, or using language to think about and act on the world, on the other” (p. 714).

Within these interactions, I refer to discourse as “language-in-use” (Gee, 2005), and the student talk was analyzed accordingly, as dynamic interaction. Because my interest was the enactment of learning within a particular context, I expanded a sociocognitive lens for analyzing classroom discourse to include how the discourse is contextualized or situated in the context of the classroom. Drawing on Gee’s conceptions of a “language event” as a social event in which language is nontrivial to the event, and a “literacy event” as any social event that uses written language in nontrivial ways, I used a micro-level analysis to describe the literacy curriculum in this classroom through an analysis of language and literacy events that make up the students’ enactment of the classroom literacy practices. I described the language-in-use during these literacy events to determine how the events were enacted by the students in this particular context. I acknowledge the complexity of the macro-level context of the classroom (the state, the school, the restrictions on English Language Learners as dictated by these contexts), but the analysis of the events was the focus of this study. This analysis bears a relationship to conversation analysis and the moment to moment interactions between teacher and students that make up the conversation of the classroom, but with a lens that incorporated “the discourse that occurs during the lesson as a window into the ways in which students are making sense of the tasks as put forth and explained by the teacher, the texts they are asked to read, and the text of the class discussion” (Goldman, 2008).

The Question

What is the role of student talk in the enactment of literary conversations and literacy practices in a classroom designed for “engaged academic literacy” (Schoenbach & Greenleaf, 2009)?

Schoenbach and Greenleaf (2009) define “engaged academic literacy” as: “Students work actively with one another, with teachers, and independently, to understand challenging texts in ways that have meaning for them and that build on their knowledge, experience, creativity, and questions” (p. 100). This definition incorporates the ideas of Brown (1992) who drew a distinction between “traditional classrooms” (which are more teacher-focused) and “intentional learning environments” (which are more student-focused). This classroom is designed as a learning environment to support engaged academic literacy. This intentional design of the classroom focused on multiple aspects of classroom life: structures in place for collaboration, text central to literacy learning, reading as a problem-solving task to be engaged by students, and students who are positioned as the meaning-makers. In this context, the role of the teacher is responsive to students’ needs and the curriculum is also adjusted accordingly. With these definitions in mind, I asked a question that would allow me to examine students’ participation in spaces that provided opportunities for engaged academic literacy through the ways student talk emerged, and the way this talk indicated their participation in the classroom literacy tasks.

The Context

The Students

The students in this study range in age from 16-20, and grades 10-12. They represented nine countries and eight different home languages. There were 20 students in the class. Of these, six are from Bhutan and speak Nepalese. Five students were from Mexico and spoke Spanish. One student from the Marshall Islands spoke Marshallese. Five students from Africa represented five countries and four languages. Despite the fact that these students were all classified at the same level of proficiency according to the AZELLA (the Arizona English Language Learner Proficiency Test), their reading, writing, talking and listening skills varied. These students had also been in the United States for varying amounts of time (from six months to four years) and came from a variety of previous schooling experiences (these experiences ranged from only primary education, to consistent formal educational settings before arriving in the United States). See Table 1 for a summary of the student characteristics.

Table 1
Participants

Student	Gender	Home Country/ Home Language	Age	Grade
Abdi*	M	Ethopia/ Arabic	17	12
Ana	F	Mexico/Spanish	16	10
Bhawana*	F	Bhutan/ Nepalese	19	12
Bishnu*	M	Bhutan/ Nepalese	18	12
Farida*	F	Tanzania/ Kirundi	17	12
Haiba*	F	Sudan/ Arabic	18	11
Halida	F	Kenya/ Maymay	18	12
Jabari*	M	Kenya/Maymay	17	11
Jordan	M	Bhutan/ Nepalese	19	12
Jose	M	Mexico/Spanish	16	11
Josue	M	Mexico/ Spanish	17	12
Kirtey	M	Bhutan/Nepalese	16	10
Kristern*	F	Bhutan/Nepalese	20	12
Makani*	F	Marshall Islands/ Marshallese	17	12
Malika*	F	Tanzania/Kirundi	20	12
Martin	M	Mexico/Spanish	16	10
Rajiv	M	Bhutan/ Nepalese	20	12
Saada*	F	Liberia/ Krahn	16	11
Tarik*	M	Ethiopia/Tigrigna	17	11

The participants in this study are students enrolled in English Language Development, 3 (ELD 3). This course is provided for students who have made their way through ELD 1 and 2, but have not yet tested as proficient on the AZELLA. Students repeat this course until they gain proficiency according to their AZELLA test scores. The state of Arizona requires students to take four hours of ELD classes per day until they reach proficiency on either the AZELLA, or they pass the AIMS high school exit exam in either Reading or Writing, at which time they may be able to reduce their number of ELD classes. The four-hour model at Level 3 includes a block class (2 hours) that combines all language arts skills (reading, writing, talking, and listening), a separate writing class (one hour) and a separate reading class (one hour). This study examined students' participation in literacy events within their two-hour block class.

The selection of the participants for this study was one of convenience, as they were my students. However, how I became their teacher was a very purposeful journey. During my time as a literacy specialist for the district, I worked to support teachers at this high school. As I did so, I became increasingly aware that I was not only interested in helping the teachers at this particular high school better meet the needs of their students, I wanted an opportunity to work alongside these teachers and to teach these students. When the opportunity arose for me to make a change in my position in the district, I pursued this position in the ELD department at this high school. I was interested in working with students for whom English was not their first language, but for whom participation in the mainstream curriculum and a high school diploma depended on becoming proficient in English. More than that, however, I wanted to engage students in

learning that allowed them to feel confident as learners and to participate effectively in academic discourse. Another layer of interest that informed my selection of context was the overarching state and district perception that these students were not capable of engaging with complex curriculum, and certainly not complex texts. I wanted to take everything I had learned in my career about effective literacy instruction and put it in place to support these students' learning. Finally, I wanted to investigate the role of student talk in learning opportunities as they were provided. I theorized that evidence of their ability to engage academic discourse would emerge from literary conversations as the students enacted them.

The Teacher and Researcher

My background is in secondary English Education. At the time of this study, I had spent nine years as an English teacher, three years as a literacy specialist in this district, and four years teaching pre-service literacy education courses at the University of Arizona. In addition to these experiences, my work as a consultant for the Strategic Literacy Initiative at West Ed labs in California, specifically the Reading Apprenticeship® project, for the past ten years also shaped my teaching.

My experience working with English Language Learners began with five years of teaching on a Navajo reservation in New Mexico. The school provided graduate level courses in linguistics and teaching English as a second language through a local university that provided distance outreach. I took advantage of these courses. During this same time, I was also afforded an opportunity to work with the Bread Loaf Teachers Network as part of my graduate work, and able to communicate with teachers from

around the country, many who worked on Indian reservations. My learning curve was steep during my tenure at the school, and these lessons shaped my teaching philosophy throughout my career. I learned that students needed regular, ongoing opportunities to think, read, write, and talk about what they read and wrote in order to become proficient.

As I approached this study, my biggest concern for secondary students was that they were asked to master complex academic discourses, but it was often the teacher who did most of the talking in the classroom (Nystrand, 1997). Providing spaces for students to share their thinking, develop personal connections and identities in relation to the texts and ideas being explored, and allowing students to make meaning for themselves was essential to me. I also recognized the importance of communicating high expectations with copious amounts of encouragement for learners who had not before seen themselves as successful academically. I wanted, more than anything, for my students to feel empowered as learners and thinkers. These experiences and philosophies, supported by the theories and research I emerged myself in as a professional and academic, deeply informed my desire to examine students' discourse as it occurred as they enacted literacy tasks.

The School

This urban high school in mid-size southwestern city served a highly diverse population. When the school was built, it was the second high school (and most innovative) in the city. Demographic shifts in the neighborhood brought changes to the school population. Years of neglect, as well, took a toll on the physical structure of the building. At the time of this study, the population of the school was 78% free and

reduced lunch, and the student body was a combination of neighborhood students, magnet students from around the city, and the largest refugee and immigrant population in the city. The school's location and proximity to bus lines, apartment buildings, and the community health and wellness services were all factors that affected the increased refugee and immigrant student population.

The high school had a total of 1315 students enrolled. Thirty-seven percent of the students were classified as English Language Learners at varying degrees of proficiency. If reclassified English Language Learners were included in the statistic, then over 60% of students were once classified as English Language Learners.

The school that provided the context for this study is one of eleven high schools in the largest school district in the mid-size southwestern city where it is located. Of particular interest in this context is the state mandated four-hour model of instruction for English Language Learners. This school context was further shaped by state policies that segregate English Language Learners from mainstream curriculum until they are able to demonstrate proficiency on the AZELLA. This school and its English Language Development department had been proactive in meeting the needs of the English Language Learners it served, but still had to work within the confines dictated by the state and district. However, this being said, there was a great deal of support (from both the ELD department and the Principal) for approaches that met the needs of students within the mandated structure of the curriculum.

Materials provided by the state and district, to enact this mandated curriculum, included a basal reader series (which included an anthology of abridged texts, grammar

workbooks, and skills-based writing workbooks). State and district auditors visited the school's ELD classrooms twice a year to report on whether we were following the prescribed curriculum, and coached us during these walkthroughs on how to better do that.

I made a decision (that was supported by building administration and department leaders) to develop an alternative curriculum that provided students' access to a literature-based curriculum that was not dependent on the anthology. I was given permission to use materials from the English department book room (even though the English department and the ELD department operated independently). I built a series of units based on specific learning goals for students (drawn from a combination of the State Standards for English and Language Arts, and the separate set of standards developed for English Language Learners). I also purchased additional texts that I wanted students to access in the units I developed.

The Classroom Setting: Physical Space, Curriculum and Instruction

The classroom space. The classroom was large. North facing windows provided striking views of the Catalina Mountains (though, throughout the first half of this study, whenever it rained, it rained *in* the classroom as well). There was a white board and projector at the front of the room, a series of desks in rows (note: desks were aligned in rows for introductory activities, but students had protocols and procedures for varieties of grouping strategies in which they spend the bulk of their instructional time), bulletin boards with student work and word walls spanned two walls (one for year-long academic

vocabulary, and one that changed depending on the unit of study). Students kept their portfolios and journals in hanging files in boxes below the bulletin boards.

I greeted the students at the door at the beginning of each class, encouraging them to adhere to our “in your seat and ready to go when the bell rings” norm. Our classroom norms were posted just to the right of the Promethean board at the front of the room for easy reference. These norms included (they were added to throughout the year): Listening while others are talking, speaking loudly enough for others to hear, sharing air time, moving in and out of groups quickly, respecting one another, participating (“no goofing off”) in groups.

The class offered students a block period (two 50 minute periods) of intensive language instruction intended to support their increased proficiency on the state language exam, and to prepare them to move into mainstream English classes. Because of these two goals, I structured the class to have regular reading and writing opportunities, as well as regular opportunities for talking and listening. I made modifications to the state mandated curriculum: grammar and mechanics work was done in the form of individualized conferences and full-group mini-lessons based on what I read and noted about each student’s writing, and I developed a literature-based curriculum that did not follow the structure of the anthology provided by the district, nor did we participate in the district-required benchmark tests that were aligned with the anthology. One hour of the block was labeled “English Language Support” for which students received elective credit, and the other was categorized as an English class for English credit toward graduation. Based on my understanding of the students’ needs, effective literacy

instruction, and recommendations in the research surrounding both literacy learning and English language development, I chose to teach the class as an integrated block class with routines that provided interrelated tasks to support literacy learning.

Curricular and instructional routines. This study focused on students' participation in a unit on Justice and Power in which they first read Walter Dean Myer's *Monster*, then William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. They read *Monster* from mid-October to the winter break in December. Data collection for this study began when students started *Julius Caesar* the second week of January through mid-March (corresponding the ending with "The Ides of March"). The data presented in this study is drawn from the eight weeks we spent reading *Julius Caesar*.

The class had some regular and ongoing routines:

- Each class began with a journal prompt that students were given 7-10 minutes to respond to. This prompt was thematically related to the text they read and asked them to generate an opinion about and make personal connections to different topics. The individual writing time was followed by a short pair discussion and full group share of ideas.

Because my goals for the full group discussions were both affective and cognitive, I walked a line between probing for thoughtful answers and encouraging students to have a voice in the classroom. Although these full group sharing sessions were short (7-10 minutes per day), they offered insight into students' thinking about different topics, and allowed them to develop facility with norms for academic discourse that I hoped would build their confidence. Because the classroom was linguistically

heterogeneous, these full group discussions necessitated that students use English as their common language. This, too, allowed them a safe space to develop proficiencies with academic language, specifically in English. Other everyday practices included the following:

- Each class included a review of the day's objectives (content and language) and an opening exercise, which served as an anticipatory set to the day's learning.
- Silent Sustained reading was a regular routine (three days per week for 20 minutes). Each student had a library book that they had self-chosen and were reading independently. (NOTE: The entire *Wimpy Kid* series made its way around the room). They kept a metacognitive log in response to their reading experiences.
- In the unit of study during which the data was collected, we were reading our third full-group text. (We first read *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, then *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers.) In this portion of the unit, we were reading *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare. The text was read in varying configurations: Students read in small groups, in pairs, independently, and occasionally as a full group as the text dictated. The bulk of time was spent in small group or pair reading and discussion groups. Full group interventions occurred when I noticed students' recurrent difficulties with a particular passage or idea.

- Students wrote essays based on themes and ideas from the text. For example, during their read of *Julius Caesar*, students wrote one personal response essay about bravery and conquering fears, two character analyses, and an analysis of the theme of justice in the play, in addition to a final essay exam.

My overarching goals as the teacher in this classroom were for students to read closely and develop capacities for creating meaning; to do this I worked to support students to develop academic confidence and to develop skills and strategies to make meaning of text, to draft and revise effective essays, and to develop skill in providing evidence and explanation for oral and written opinions and claims about texts and related themes. All classroom routines were intended to engage students in the work of making meaning (with a focus on leading toward independence) and demonstrating understanding, as well as sharing their ideas and opinions about various concepts that we examined as a class. This study focused on what was indicated in students' talk as they engaged in these activities.

Social structures and instructional scaffolds. The social structure of the classroom was designed to support students' participation. The classroom climate was one I intentionally worked to support based on my understandings of theories of learning as well as my lived experience. We established norms for participation, had regular and ongoing conversations about both the content and process of the reading we were doing, with a heavy focus on metacognitive conversation. From the moment students walked in, they were expected to participate, to share their ideas orally and in writing, and to

collaboratively inquire into texts to make meaning of both the text and the world. In order to support students in developing confidence and willingness to collaborate and share their ideas, I structured different participation routines (as listed above) to offer students a variety of entry points for this work.

Students were asked to regularly reflect on their own processes and about themselves as learners: “Thus it is clear that, in this view of literacy, we cannot separate literacy from trust, values, access, and affiliation” (Gee, 2001, p. xvii). I designed an instructional context intended to offer students opportunities to develop trust in the learning process. In order to develop trust in the process and facility with reading, students need “abundant experiences of working to comprehend text in the company of others. They need ongoing opportunities to consider and reconsider—through text-based discussion—what texts may mean and how they know what they mean” (Schoenbach, Greenleaf & Murphy, 2012, p. 23). The literature in the field has provided recommendations for creating learning contexts, for designing curriculum and instruction (from a focus on what is missing in classrooms) without fully examining how students respond to these spaces and learning experiences. By asking how students respond to and enact these learning experiences, this study investigated an area of classroom life that has not been investigated.

The literacy tasks and corresponding texts provided for students at the beginning of the year were designed as scaffolds to support students in comprehending texts and developing strategies for meaning making that would lead toward greater independence in reading. Reading was continually framed as a complex problem-solving activity. We

spent time developing “Good Readers Strategies” Lists and these became organic documents that we added to when we read new texts.

Through regular and ongoing experiences with text, students were continually asked to identify both their processes of making meaning and be aware of their confusions. Through modeling of my own reading processes, and reciprocal models that students engaged in, students were offered multiple opportunities to build knowledge in regards to the processes experienced readers used to make meaning of text. I also wanted them to engage an academic stance toward textual analysis in which they used evidence to support their interpretations of literature and to engage in text-based discussions that deepen their engagement and understanding. Reading tasks regularly asked students to generate opinions and to support their opinions with evidence from the text. My long-term objective was that students would define themselves as readers and thinkers and position themselves as active learners who could take control of and be confident in the value of their opinions in academic settings.

We began the year with a series of shorter readings related to personal identity. Students were asked to engage core routines for reading as they read these less complex texts: talking to the text, identifying confusions, discussing opinions and evidence. The first full-group novel we read was Sandra Cisneros’ *House on Mango Street*, which was a core text for the “regular” freshman English courses at this high school. Using these less-complex texts, we began to establish norms for interaction and discussion as well. The second text we read was *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers. This text was intended to support students in becoming adept in analyzing point of view (both *House on Mango*

Street and *Monster* allowed students opportunities to analyze reliability of narrator.) The disciplinary ways of thinking and making meaning were approached first in the form of less complex texts.

All of the reading for the class was done during class time. Most often, the participation structures allowed students to read in small groups or pairs. Full group models of short passages set up the tasks and the focus for reading, but students were expected to do the bulk of reading collaboratively in small groups or pairs. I socially engineered groups—placing less confident or seemingly less willing students with students who were more engaged, or grouping less-experienced readers with more-experienced readers. Our groupings varied regularly. There were occasions when I thought that language-alike groups would support students’ learning more effectively, and at other times I engineered groups so that there were no more than two students per group who spoke the same home language. Because these “heterogeneous” groups were heterogeneous in a variety of ways—home language, proficiency with English, affective reasons, etc.—I had many ways that I encouraged students to work together and in different configurations that I believed would support their learning. I most often found that students who were more willing to participate were those who had adopted a stance that was more inquiry based, and less focused on determining a “right” answer or getting through a task. My goal was to help all students adopt this stance toward learning.

My role as the teacher in this classroom during these small group and pair discussions was that of moving around from group to group answering clarifying questions as the students used their resources to make meaning of texts and worked to

comprehend what was being said. At the time this data was collected, students had been introduced to a wide range of comprehension strategies throughout the year that were continually added to as we approached new texts and genres. They were encouraged to use these to make meaning of challenging passages in the text. Some of these strategies were text-specific (like reading the footnotes for different lines in the play *Julius Caesar*). Some were more general, like using context clues to figure out language that was unfamiliar, clarifying meanings with the group, and if this wasn't available, looking in the dictionary.

Students developed a repertoire of approaches for comprehension, and were often able to make sense of text without teacher clarification, but a regular and ongoing classroom process was checking in for clarity with me. These processes will be described in more detail in the findings surrounding the themes that emerged from the student talk during these tasks.

Tasks were designed so that the students bear the ownership of making meaning of this complex text. I tried my best not to “talk the text” to them. I reminded them that I became a pretty proficient reader because I had a lot more experience, not because I was “smarter.” And I reminded them that the more experience they had as readers, the more proficient and independent they would become.

The participation structures were most often opportunities for “collaborative problem solving”—I had initially thought that there was solely an apprenticeship model at work, but realized that, in addition to this, I had designed learning opportunities that required that students jointly mediate language and texts to make meaning. And it was

through this mediation that participation was enacted. “Wells (1998) has argued that student-to-student assistance “when no transfer of responsibility between expert and novice is intended” is best described as ‘collaborative problem solving’” (Lantolf, 2000, p. 48). I did model processes and practices, but the bulk of the students’ work was with their peers. These peer conversations provided the central data source for this study.

These social structures within the classroom were supported by both the architecture of the classroom learning experiences, and the scaffolds put in place for the enactment of these experiences. Intentional framing of tasks as learning experiences and that supported students to develop dispositions toward learning, specifically reading literature, that disrupted a more common procedural display orientation that is seen more often in lower track classrooms (Applebee, 1994; Rex 2001). Because of this, the social climate and opportunities for student voice are built into the tasks that students were to complete in this classroom. Once again, how students took up and responded to these opportunities was the focus for this study.

Task design. A regular and ongoing routine in the classroom was paired and small group read-alouds/ think-alouds where students were asked to make meaning of sections of text orally (with a partner or small group), to discuss their thinking as they read, annotate the text, and to provide written responses and evidence for their thinking about the meaning of sections.

For the different scenes in *Julius Caesar*, I purposefully chunked the text for them and wrote guiding questions to help them make meaning and take away the main idea from a particular section. For example, I would ask students to read lines 89-112 and

explain what _____ meant when he said _____ and how did _____ respond. This task design provided a scaffold and an additional structure for reading for students to follow as they read. Alternatively, there were also times when I provided students with double-column notetakers on which they recorded quotes they identified as particularly important to the section they were reading (in the left hand column), and wrote personal responses to these quotes: questions, clarifications, predictions, or personal connections (in the right hand column). This self-guided approach was more challenging, but provided me with good insight into how students understood particular sections of text in addition to the ideas they were generating in relation to the text.

The same routines for reading that were introduced while reading *Monster* were used while reading *Julius Caesar*. Students were able to develop a certain level of comfort with the structure and demands of the tasks while reading *Monster*, and I was able to build on this as we moved into the more difficult reading experience of *Julius Caesar*. I provided more scaffolding while reading *Julius Caesar* than I might normally when reading a contemporary text.

When I wrote guiding questions for *Julius Caesar*, I focused first on students' literal comprehension of the text (For example: "What did Antony mean on line _____ when he said _____), and then would lead them (through additional guiding questions) to make inferences based on their understanding of the literal meaning of the text. This task design built on routines that had been developed prior to this study during the reading of *Monster*, where students were provided with similar questions to respond to. I left more

room for personal response and inferences when we were reading *Monster* for the during-reading questions than I did when we read *Julius Caesar*. Students were asked to make more personal connections and to analyze character's motivation more frequently in their responses to *Monster* because the comprehension was not as much of a challenge.

During the reading of *Julius Caesar*, the questions asked students to explain their literal understandings of the text, as well as their thinking about these understandings.

Pilot Study

Prior to the formal data collection for this study, students' conversations about the novel *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers were recorded; I ran two video cameras per class period to collect a representative sampling of students. I had two students who declined to be videotaped (but were willing for audio to be recorded) so these students were never in the line of sight of the camera. I viewed these tapes weekly, and selected samples of literary conversations to re-view. This informal phase of data collection allowed me to refine logistical processes (where to place cameras, etc.) and begin some preliminary analysis of the classroom structure. It also allowed me to gain additional insight into the classroom climate and routines that would inform the central data collection used for this study during the students' reading of *Julius Caesar*. My initial collection of data prior to the reading of *Julius Caesar* also allowed me to identify some overarching patterns in the classroom (participation structures, how students engaged one other during literature discussions, and refine grouping ideas).

Early observations indicated that when students engaged in discussions about the literature, they provided more specific textual evidence to support their thinking if they

were developing opinions or making personal connections to the text, as opposed to answering literal or inferential comprehension questions. For example, when I asked students to develop arguments as to whether or not the protagonist in *Monster* was innocent or guilty, they were willing to go back into the text to cite evidence, whereas when they were simply discussing their comprehension of and literal meaning of a section of text, they had a tendency to just speak in generalities about the text without pointing to a specific piece of evidence for their claim.

During this pilot study, I refined my ideas regarding the corpus of data to be collected and analyzed, and to begin looking for patterns that emerged. I was also afforded insights that allowed me to continue to refine my data collection, and to determine segments of my data set that were most responsive to my research question. The data collection during the reading of *Monster* [not included in this study] provided insights into the overview of the class period, but I realized for the question for the dissertation study, there was no reason to collect data regarding students' writing workshop time or times when they were engaged in independent work or silent reading. Whereas I ran the video camera throughout every class period during the first semester, I narrowed my focus during the second semester to the times when students were engaged in full group discussions of their journal entries and their engagement with reading tasks in pairs and small groups.

Data Collection

Classroom Observations

Videotaped classroom observations of full and small group discussions provided the central data source for this study. The data for this study comes from a larger body of video taped classroom interactions that were recorded throughout the school year. The data that I collected and analyzed for this study was collected during the second half of the unit (that began with the pilot study), from January to mid-March. During this time, I videotaped portions of the class period when students were participating in small group reading and discussion of text. The data for this study was collected during the 10 weeks students were reading *Julius Caesar*. My corpus of data for this study included 45 class periods of video where students read and discussed literature. I collected 20 class periods (ranging from 45-50 minutes each) of video during January, 15 class periods during February, and 10 class periods during March. These video clips focused on different groups in the classroom, providing a comprehensive view of group interactions over the course of the week. Generally speaking, one of the two periods of the block was devoted to reading and responding to reading, and the other was devoted to writing tasks, so on most days the camera was running for one period of the block.

Because my purpose was a discourse analysis of language and literacy events in the classroom in order to describe how students' literacy learning was enacted, I reviewed video where student talk appeared as central to the task. Within these samples, I noted patterns that surfaced as students engaged with the close reading tasks provided in the context of the classroom. Christoph and Nystrand (2001) provided a model for how

this might occur: “we regularly reviewed our notes as the semester progressed, forming hypotheses about how the class functioned” (p. 256). One period of each day was structured for small group and paired reading of the text. An overview of the data set for this study indicated that for every thirty minutes of in-class reading time, students talked about their meaning making and interpretation of the text for at least twenty minutes of that time, with varying levels of individualized support from the teacher.

Because I am the teacher in this classroom, time for on-the-spot field notes was limited, but I did collect reflective memos throughout the study. For example, during student journal writing time at the beginning of each class period, I made a daily routine of recording questions I had, observations I was making about student participation, as well as observations about dynamics between students. I also wrote evening reflections about what I noticed occurring in class each day. My purpose for these reflective memos was on how students interacted, how they participated, and the interactions (positive and negative) that occurred in different groups I observed.

My position as the teacher in this classroom afforded me multiple and varied opportunities to interact with students, providing me with insights into their participation and behavior that I would not have had otherwise. Students’ comments about their participation were helpful in understanding the ways in which they engaged the tasks in the ways they did.

Data Analysis

My stance toward data collection and analysis was both iterative and generative. I continually reflected on what I was seeing in the classroom, made adjustments to

instruction, and new insights, ideas, and questions surfaced as I continued to make sense of my research question: What is the role of student talk in the enactment of literary conversations and literacy practices in a classroom designed for “engaged academic literacy” (Schoenbach & Greenleaf, 2009)? The organization and coding of the events allowed me to examine students’ talk during the close reading tasks assigned in this classroom, and what this talk indicated about students’ literacy practices as they engaged these tasks.

During the collection of data for this study, I viewed the video from the class weekly. In these initial viewings, I identified segments of video in which students were working collaboratively with text and engaged in close reading practices, and to come back to ideas I had highlighted in my reflective memos throughout the week. I first organized these video data by topic: Data that provided insight into student-to-student talk went in another folder, and data that provided insight into the relationship between student and teacher talk went into another. These general categories (in relation to the research question I posed) served as a starting point for organization as I moved beyond these initial examinations of the data.

After completing an initial analysis of the larger corpus of data, I narrowed my focus to segments in which students were engaged in making meaning in small group participation structures and noted initial categories of the student talk. I transcribed and analyzed these identified segments. These segments illustrated initial categories that included students taking up the learning opportunities in the class (this included whether

or not they used the scaffolds that were provided), examples of students' meaning-making of text, examples of patterns in the conversation that seemed unusual or unique.

From the larger corpus of data (45 class periods), based on the patterns I had identified, I selected representative examples to transcribe. These segments included moments where I saw examples of students' practices for meaning making, which I had identified from the larger data set. These examples included eight video segments that illustrated the themes (listed below in Table 2) I was noticing in the classroom. These examples were transcribed and reviewed alongside the transcriptions for accuracy. The transcription conventions listed below were used:

/ indicates a pause of a second. Multiple slashes (///) indicate length.

X indicates an inaudible syllable of speech. Multiple "X" indicate length.

↷ indicates overlapping speech.

ñ indicates rise in intonation.

... indicates that speech trails off.

[] actions that occur as words are being spoken are placed in brackets.

Underlined words indicate emphasis.

All names of students are pseudonyms

Table 2
Evolution of Categories

Initial Categories within Student Talk	Codes	Final Categories
Students' Collaboration	Identifying confusions Sharing confusions Negotiating meanings of text Building on ideas Supporting one another/ Redirect engagement Provide attribution for ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Metacognitive Awareness
Students' Uptake of Teacher Support	Asking questions Re-reading Cite evidence in the text Clarification of vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Persistence with Task
Students' Meaning-Making Processes	Identifying literal meaning of text Evidence of meaning making Clarifying Questioning Predicting Making Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cognitive Strategy Use

Although I was using constant comparative analysis (Strauss, 1987) to generate codes and patterns in the students' interactions, I was working from a theoretical framework that offered me something to look for. Moje et al. (2004) used a similar approach to grounded theory acknowledging, "we do not wish to imply that we approach our data analysis without guiding questions and theories or that the categories we analyze through CCA emerged from the data apart from our particular theoretical stance" (p. 50). My theoretical stance informed the way I selected specific examples for analysis and the analysis itself. Within the general categories, I looked for indicators: of students' collaboration, of students' uptake of support, and of students' meaning making. These indicators that drew my attention were informed by the characteristics of examples of what Langer (2001) calls "minds-on" learning and what Nystrand and colleagues (2003) call dialogic conversation. These indicators of participation and engagement of ideas through collaborative conversations were illustrated at times when students were collaborating on tasks, jointly constructing meaning, discussing meaning, and taking ownership of their learning. Finally, these indicators were clustered into three main categories: metacognitive awareness, cognitive strategy use, and persistence.

I read and annotated the transcriptions according to what I was noticing within each, and then looked for key words that emerged and classified them according to initial categories: students' collaboration, students' uptake of teacher support, students' meaning making processes. More specific codes emerged in subsequent readings of the transcripts to more accurately name the processes students' engaged. Lastly, final categories were created that captured the overarching trends these codes were indicating.

I noted patterns in students' engagement not only with the subject matter, but in the students' processes of making sense of the text and collaboratively negotiating meanings as a group. As I continued my analysis, representative examples within these codes provided a clearer view of how students took up the literacy tasks. The final categories that emerged as the representative practices that students engaged were: cognitive strategy use, metacognitive awareness, and persistence with the literacy task.

Within these transcribed examples, I continued to refine the analysis and selected illustrative events of each of the different categories. This analysis brought me continually closer to understanding the students' participation in the literacy events in this classroom. Although this classroom culture and these students were obviously very well known to me, I did find that the process of analysis and close examination of the videotaped events allowed me to disrupt this familiarity with my subjects and created additional spaces for questions and observation from that stance. It was essential to note that there were moments in the videotaped discussions that were surprising to me (even in events where I was present). Despite my feeling that I was a highly responsive teacher, it was virtually impossible to attend to every nuance and detail in the moment of interaction, and this backward glance afforded by this analysis allowed me to examine the exchanges in a much more nuanced manner than I could have otherwise.

Describing how these conversations occurred, what was said, what was responded to, and how, helped shed light on how students chose to participate within their classroom context. Donato (2000) recommends an analysis of instructional talk to "capture a wider range of communicative and cognitive functions of talk" by English language learners,

and this informed my selection of the units of data that I chose to analyze. I analyzed how students participated within the structures in place in the classroom, and what literacy practices the students' talk made apparent.

Summary

This chapter described the context for the study and the methods employed. Broadly speaking, this context was an urban high school located in a mid-size southwestern city. This urban school had a highly heterogeneous population, and this study was of one classroom within this school. The ELD classroom that was the focus of this study included twenty students for whom English was a second language.

Data collection focused on videotaped classroom observations, specifically of small group conversations that occurred as students collaboratively read, made meaning of, and discussed *Julius Caesar*. Analysis of the data was a constant comparative analysis. The initial categories included: students' collaboration, students' uptake of teacher support, and students' meaning-making processes. Codes that emerged indicated specific practices, which students engaged within these categories. From those specific practices, final categories were identified. These final categories included: metacognitive awareness, persistence with the task, and cognitive strategy use.

The purpose of this investigation was to analyze what students said and did when offered the opportunity to engage in the literacy tasks and literary conversations in the classroom. Because we know very little about what students in "lower-track" classrooms do and say when offered the chance to engage with complex text and to make meaning, we have little insight into how students may or may not take up the opportunities to engage in

these practices. This study provides insight into students' practices, as indicated through their participation in classroom discourse, in these literacy events.

The following chapter provides descriptions of students' interactions in relation to these final categories that emerged surrounding classroom participation. Within the context of our classroom, I described how the students' participation was enacted, and how students participated in literacy tasks and literary conversations in the classroom context.

CHAPTER 4

SCENE BY SCENE: SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

In this chapter, I present an analysis of the student talk that occurred within small-group conversations about *Julius Caesar*. Students' talk was the indicator of practices that students engaged in as they participated in literary conversations and interacted with one another and the text. This chapter offers examples of literary conversations that students engaged in, and explores the question: What is the role of student talk in the enactment of literary conversations and literacy practices in a classroom designed for “engaged academic literacy” (Schoenbach & Greenleaf, 2009)?

One period of each day was structured for small group and paired reading of the text and the completion of a corresponding task. An overview of the data set (45 class periods) indicated that for every thirty minutes of in-class reading time, students were engaged in collaboratively reading aloud, making meaning, and discussing the text with peers for at least twenty minutes of the time, with varying levels of individualized support from the teacher. The conversations in this chapter represent students' interactions with text, each other and the teacher.

Within the small group and pair interactions that students participated in as they made meaning of the text, students engaged practices and strategies during their literacy tasks. The following examples describe the approaches students used as they made meaning of the text in pairs and small groups, how students took up responsibility for their meaning making, and the interplay between the students' engagement with meaning making and literary discussion. The examples are organized according to the final

categories that emerged from the analysis described in the foregoing chapter: metacognitive awareness, use of cognitive strategies to make meaning, and persistence.

Metacognitive Awareness

Example 1

In the following example, three students were orally reading a section of dialogue from *Julius Caesar* between Brutus and Cassius, in which the two characters were discussing the death of Brutus's wife Portia. The teacher asked the students to figure out what was occurring in the scene, to answer a series of guiding questions, and to determine what insights the reading gave them about Brutus and Cassius.

1 Malika: [to teacher] Miss, I have a question. Miss. What is he talking about here? [pointing to the text]

Malika requested assistance with a section of text that she was reading orally with her group. She stopped the teacher and asked for help.

Teacher: [Reading the line Malika is pointing to in the text] "No man bears...sorrow better than..."

5 Malika: What is this sor

In Line 5, Malika identified a particular word ("sorrow") that she needed clarification for.

Teacher: Sorrow. Sadness.

Malika: Ohh. Okay.

Teacher: Cassius is the one we were just talking about. What does he tell him? What does he tell Cassius?

- 10 Malika: He tell Cassius that who died, this name...[pointing to the text]
 Teacher: Portia
 Malika: She died.
 Teacher: Portia. Who's Portia?
 Malika: [responds quickly] I don't know.
- 15 Haiba: His the guy [meaning "he's the guy's"]
 Malika: The guy's wife?
 Teacher: Whose wife?
 Malika: Brutus' wife.
 Teacher: Mmmm...
- 20 Saada: Brutus wife died? ↑
 Teacher: Mmm Hmmm
 Saada: Who kill her?
 Malika: Maybe she kill herself. Maybe she kill himself [sic] because they was they kill Caesar...
- 25 Saada: So Brutus' wife died. And he said it himself like it don't mean nothing.//
 See he said, "man bears sorrow better Portia is dead" [While hitting the place in text where she is reading with her pencil]
 Malika: Sorrow means sad.
 Saada: I know. But he's saying like he don't care.

This exchange began with Malika calling me over (Line 1) with a general confusion that led to the identification of a specific word that was causing confusion.

Malika's identification of her general confusion, in itself, is indication of metacognitive awareness. When the teacher read the line aloud (Lines 3-4), Malika interrupted the reading to ask for clarification for the definition of the word "sorrow." She refined her more general, "What is he talking about here?" (Line 1), and identified a specific roadblock. Malika took up responsibility for her own learning in a couple of ways here: 1) She had the metacognitive awareness to identify a place in the text where she is confused; and 2) she was willing to ask for help and for a clarification for her confusion. Malika constructed meaning and bore responsibility for her learning through her acknowledgement of her general confusion and her ability to take control of her reading process by asking for the clarification of a specific word in the text that needed defining.

Malika indicated, on Line 11, that she did understand what had happened to the character, but because the character's name was unfamiliar to her, and she could not pronounce the name, she was initially unable to recognize the identity of the character. On Lines 14-15, however, it became apparent that Malika did know who the character was. And, based on the confirmation she received for the character's identity, the group as a whole was able to draw conclusions about the main point of the scene based on the information they had received (Lines 23-29).

Once Malika heard the name and discussed the character's identity with her partner, she remembered who the character was and the significance of this information about the character (Line 23). She drew conclusions about the information she had received, and applied this understanding to the larger ideas in the text. At this point in the conversation, Malika had worked out what had occurred and made some predictions

as to why Caesar's wife may have killed herself. The students persisted with the discussion and used both the clarification and collaboration to help them make meaning of larger ideas in the text.

The students' participation structure allowed for Saada to share in and benefit from the process Malika used to make sense of the text. Saada's statement on Line 20 indicated that she was following the conversation. She was able to put the ideas together herself, and on Line 25, she drew the conclusion that Brutus was presenting this information to Cassius as if he did not care. In this exchange, Saada drew a conclusion about the literal meaning of the text and extended this into examining a character's motivation based on what she heard in the conversation and what she drew as the meaning of the exchange based on her own focused re-read (Line 26) of the character's words. Saada's attentiveness and her ability to put together the meaning of this passage as she actively listened to the group's conversation indicated that she too was taking up responsibility for her own meaning making. For example, on Line 28, Saada drew conclusions about Brutus's character through an analysis of his motivation for the way he was talking and acting in response to his wife's death. Not only did Saada draw conclusions about a literary element of the text (characterization), she also provided attribution (unprompted) for her contribution. Saada's willingness and ability to share her reasoning for her response indicated her own metacognitive awareness and ability to engage in a conversation that provided explanation for how and why she was thinking what she was.

Through the close reading process the students engaged in, and through the clarification of ideas presented in the text, the students were able to move from a literal clarification of the meaning of the text to a more literary conversation using disciplinary ways of constructing an argument based in evidence from the literature they were reading. The students' participation in this dialogue indicated a willingness to co-construct meaning, and indicated that the small group collaboration structure was a space where students' engagement with one another and the text allowed them to make meaning of the text by drawing on each others' insights. Students' metacognitive awareness, in this case their awareness of their own thinking about the reading they were engaged with, was indicated most often by their identification of specific places in the text where they experienced confusion.

Example 2

In this example, Makani and Saada were working together to answer the question: "What is the citizens' response to Antony's speech?" In order to answer this question, the students needed to analyze the statements made by Brutus and Antony as they delivered their speeches to the citizens, and to track the citizens' responses. Their task was to note what the speaker said, and the corresponding response from the citizens. Makani stopped the teacher as she was moving around the room and said to the teacher, "I don't get this."

1 Makani: [to teacher] I don't get this.

Makani has identified that she is confused by the passage, but at this point did not identify a specific place in the text that was causing this confusion, nor does she explain why it is confusing.

Teacher: Let's talk about what you don't get, Makani.

Makani: Uhhh..."Methink there is much reason in his saying" [reading a line from the text]

With the prompting of the teacher on Line 2, Makani identified the place in the text that was causing the confusion, and read it aloud (Line 3).

Teacher: Yeah. What's reason? "Methinks there is much reason in his
5 sayings..." [repeating the line that Makani read from the text]

Makani: Thought?

Teacher: Yeah... // reason is like "Hmmm those are good reasons. It makes sense."

Saada: His ideas make sense?

Saada indicated that she was listening to the conversation by repeating what the teacher said.

10 Teacher: Yeah, I think he has some ideas that make sense here... / we should listen to him. [teacher walks away]

Saada: [to Makani] So that's their [the citizens'] response?

Makani: Yeah. [writing as she says this]

Makani's clarification of the meaning of the line from the text allowed her to respond to the guiding question, which asked her to describe the citizens' response to Antony's

speech. Makani identified her confusion, asked the teacher for clarification, and was able to complete the task based on what she learned. This practice not only offered a space for Makani to make meaning of the text, but her request for help, in conjunction with the participation structure the students were working in, also provided a benefit for her partner to clarify her understanding as well.

Makani: [to Saada] I don't get the question.

When Makani moved to the next question, it was not the text itself but the question that caused confusion. Once again, she was willing to ask for help when she was confused. Her partner provided support for an inquiry into the text.

15 Saada: What is Antony trying to do here? Read it. Right here. Right? She said on line 144.

Makani: to 147

Saada: [reading] Right here...

[re-reading the lines M has just read... out loud but to self]

"It is not meet you know how Caesar loved you.

20 You are not wood, you are not stones, but men;

And being men, hearing the will of Caesar,

It will inflame you, it will make you mad" (*Act III, Scene 2, Lines 144-147*).

[to Makani]: I think he's not trying to read the letter to them.

Saada re-read the text and clarified it for Makani.

Makani: He's not trying to read it... / oh yeah, because he's saying 'I've got the

25 will but I'll not read it.'

[Saada is writing response]

Saada modeled her process for making meaning here (which included re-reading the text), and also her interpretation of the text. Makani's acknowledgment of confusion created a space for Saada to model cognitive processes for meaning making—re-reading and clarification—as she provided Makani with an additional model for meaning making.

Saada: Makani

Makani: what?

Saada: I'm going to let you do all the work, okay?

30 Makani: You what?

Saada: (singing) I'm gonna let you do all the work.

Makani continued working through the text independently.

Saada: I don't get this Makani. I'm sorry. [Saada begins drawing on the notebook in front of her]

Saada shifted her engagement with the task and her partner here, and indicated on line 32 that the reason was that she didn't "get this." Makani continued working independently.

Two minutes later, Saada rejoined the conversation.

Saada: You need help Makani?

Makani: Hm?

35 Saada: Do you need help?

Makani: XX

Saada: She's like, of course girl, I'm your partner. What kind of stupid question is that? [Saada continues drawing]

Saada's statement in Line 37 indicated that she knew that her role was to work with her partner to understand the text.

40 Saada: Okay Makani, look. Who are the people in this scene? [re-reading section that Makani just read aloud]

They don't want Brutus to be the king? Right?//

Makani: Hm?

Saada: They don't want Brutus to be the king?

Makani: Yeah.

45 Saada: What did you say for this one?

Makani: What?

Saada: The first one.

[The question stated: "Read Lines 75-83. What does Antony mean when he says: "the noble Brutus hath told you Caesar was ambitious. If it were so, it was a grievous fault, and grievously hath Caesar answered it"?]

Makani: I said the main point of this is Antony say that he only speak right on to know that Caesar was sweet XX Brutus said Caesar was not sweet...sweet on XXX

[Saada snatched the paper away from Makani and begins copying response that Makani has just read. She finishes copying and puts her head down on her desk.]

This pair interaction provided three different patterns of engagement as students worked through a task that was intended to support their reading of a section of text.

From Lines 1-25, both students were engaged in making meaning of the text and working

collaboratively to answer the guiding questions. Even though the structure and time existed for them to continue to work together to make meaning of the text, from Lines 26-32 Saada, shifted her engagement with Makani. Her statement of, “I don’t get this” on Line 32 seemed unprompted by anything in particular. She returned to active collaboration and meaning making with Makani on Lines 35-49.

This example began with Makani asking an unprompted question and requesting support. The teacher prompted her to be more specific on Line 2, “Let’s talk about what you don’t get.” Makani’s metacognitive awareness and her ability to identify where in the text she became confused, supported her in being more strategic as she read and asked for clarification, and employed strategies to make sense of the text. Makani made a general statement of “I don’t get it” twice during this example (Line 1 and Line 14). However, the one-minute exchange that occurred through Line 11 provided an opportunity to clarify the term “reason” which was being used in an unfamiliar way in this passage. Saada’s statement on Line 9 indicated she understood the section.

On Line 14, Makani again made a general statement about not “getting” something, but acknowledged her awareness about a new confusion that had surfaced. Saada redirected her to the text and the task they had been asked to complete. Saada read and clarified the meaning of the question for Makani and created a space for a conversation that allowed them to figure out the meaning of the rest of the section of text. On Line 23, Saada again redirects Makani and provided attribution for the conclusion she drew from the text. Makani joined Saada in the text-based discussion and also re-read the portion of text. The collaboration structure, combined with students willingness to

acknowledge and identify confusions, allowed students the opportunity to make meaning of the text. The students demonstrated an understanding of the literal meaning of the text in their conversation. Throughout this exchange, the role of language emerges from the social and cultural activity that the students are engaged in, in this case, making meaning of text.

During the middle portion of the task, Saada's collaboration with her partner shifted. On Line 31, Saada tried to re-engage with Makani, but Makani didn't offer a response. Finally, on Line 45 Saada re-engaged with the meaning-making task and with Makani. Despite the fluctuations in the effectiveness of the partnership, the goal of working through, making meaning, and drawing conclusions from the text was reached.

The participation structure along with the close reading task, created an opportunity for these students to engage actively in practices that demonstrated their ability to take responsibility for their reading process, including their shifts in participation. The students' willingness to engage with the text and one another, in addition to being willing to ask each other questions about the text indicated that they understood the purpose and the value of the participation structure. This engagement and participation, coupled with the metacognitive awareness they demonstrated, provided them an opportunity to, ultimately, make meaning of the remainder of a section of text without the aid of a teacher.

Example 3

Farida had her hand raised and the teacher walked over and took a seat next to her.

1 Teacher: sup [taking chair next to pair working]

Farida: We don't understand the whole// thing // like who's Portia [pronounced por-tee-uh] and who's Lu...

At this point, the teacher stood and asked the full group to confirm the identities of these different characters. Members of the class were able to confirm that Portia was Brutus' wife, and Lucius was her servant. When the teacher sat back down with the pair she was working with, the characters' identities were confirmed and the students began working through additional confusions.

Teacher: Did you guys read the summary at the top?

Farida: Uh yeah.

5 Teacher: That will help. What does it say? [pointing to text]

Farida: He he Brutus tell his wife the secret so his wife was afraid...and I don't know...Soothsayer...he xxx [inaudible but trying to pronounce "encountered" as she re-reads the section]

Teacher: Encounters. That means he sees. Sees Portia on his way to warn
10 Caesar one final time. [reading]

Farida: oh...

Teacher: So. What's this first section about.

Farida: I don't understand this "I prithee boy run to the senate"

This very specific reference to a section of the text (Line 14), contrasted with the "We don't understand the whole thing" (Line 2) indicated the student's metacognitive awareness that allowed her to begin to narrow in on confusions and ask specific questions

about the text. The student, on Line 13, narrows in on a particular line from *Julius Caesar* that she is unsure about.

Teacher: [reading] I prithee boy [pointing to the footnote in the right hand
 15 margin for definition of prithee then read the line with the definition from
 the footnote in place of the word] “I pray thee boy. Run to the senate house.
 Stay not to answer me. But get thee gone. Why dost thou stay?” What’s she
 telling him to do?

Farida: To go there.

20 Teacher: Yeah. To go to the senate and see what’s going on.

Farida: She’s telling Lucius (pronounced Lucus) to go there.

Teacher: Yeah. To go to the senate.

Farida: oh.

Teacher: Because why does she want him to go?

25 Farida: To see what’s going on there.

Farida initially indicated that they were unable to understand any of the section they were reading. The teacher stood and asked the full group to confirm the identities of the characters in the scene. Multiple students responded with correct answers, and Portia’s identity (as Brutus’s wife) and Lucius’ identity (as Portia’s servant) were confirmed. The teacher asked the students if they had read the summary of the scene that was located at the top of the page. The students indicated that they had, but the teacher prompted them to re-read the summary.

After this experience of re-reading, Farida asked a specific question for clarification. The students had not used these cognitive processes and strategies (re-reading, summarizing, and using text features) on their own, but were willing to engage the strategies, and these ultimately led to their understanding of the section, as indicated on Line 25 when Farida says “to see what’s going on there.”

Throughout this example, the students were willing to identify places in the text that caused them confusion. This metacognitive awareness allowed the students to identify these places that caused confusion, and begin to engage cognitive strategy use. Farida did not independently solve her confusions, but she was able and willing to articulate where these confusions occurred. This ability and awareness allowed her to receive support from the teacher and engage cognitive strategies. Farida was able, with support, to re-read, to identify places in the text that were confusing, and, once again, with support, to use the footnotes in the text to make sense of unfamiliar vocabulary.

Use of Cognitive Strategies to Make Meaning

As seen in the example above, students’ metacognitive awareness supported their ability to identify spaces where they experienced confusions that necessitate the use of cognitive strategies that will help them make meaning. Students engaged in cognitive strategy use to solve their comprehension problems and this allowed them to move forward with their meaning making in the text and to continue forward with the literacy tasks they engaged.

Example 1

A trio of students was working to clarify the events that occurred when Decius (a conspirator) came to get Caesar to go with him to the capital on the day the conspirators were planning to kill him. Caesar's wife, Calpurnia, had shared with Caesar a dream she had the previous night and begged him not to go, but Decius came in with an alternate interpretation of the dream. The task the students were working on was to explain Calpurnia's statement: "Your wisdom is consumed in confidence" (Act II, Scene 2, Line 49).

1 Bishnu: [to Bhawana] Read.

I think it's...

[Bhawana had her hand raised.] She held out her paper out as the teacher walked up indicating that she wanted clarification of whether or not the answer she had written was correct. When she walked up to the group, the teacher read the student's answer aloud, then pointed to the text.

Teacher: [walks up to group and reads answer Bhawana had written on paper she held out] Right. Yeah. So...// Decius shows up...[pointing at text]

5 Bhawana: Yeah.

Teacher: Right here...

Bhawana: Right here.

Teacher: Remember who Decius is...// he's from the last scene?

Bhawana: He's with the Brutus group.

10 Teacher: Yeah, he's with the Brutus group.

So we know he's one of the...

Bhawana: the conspirators

Tarik: Declus [sic] is from the conspiracy?

Teacher: mmhmmm

Tarik: Wow, this is going well...

15 Teacher: So he's coming over to do what?

[all three talking]

Bishnu: Not be a coward.↵

Bhawana: Oh, to convince Caesar...↵

Tarik: To convince him to don't be a coward.↵

This short example provided a close look at how students individually made meaning and how their individual interpretations and conclusions led to a complete explanation of the meaning of the events in the text. This entire exchange lasted for about three minutes, but the conclusions that the students drew were key to building an understanding of the deeper meanings of the rest of the play. On Line 7, Bhawana confirmed the place in the text she had drawn her answer from, and the teacher posed an additional question. The students made interpretations based on the literature and clarified their thinking.

Tarik's statement on Line 14, "Wow, this is going well..." was an indication that he was able to see the connection between this plot development and other events that had occurred in the play so far. In order to determine the larger meaning of the scene based on this portion, as Tarik did on Line 14, he had to determine the character's

motivation and to be able to understand the plot line of the conspiracy. The students' three responses (on Lines 16-18) built on one another, and Tarik put it together on the last line. This example extended the meaning making and clarification beyond Bhawana's initial request for help based on her desire for a clarification of a confusion she had identified. Because Bhawana asked for the clarification she did, and the group talked through this with the guidance of the teacher, Tarik recognized a confusion he was unaware he had, and ended up being able to summarize the scene. Tarik engaged cognitive strategies here of clarification and summarizing (Schoenbach, Greenleaf & Murphy, 2012).

This exchange indicated that not only did the individual student's metacognitive awareness support their meaning making, but the collaborative structure offered the other students in the group an opportunity to clarify their understanding as well, and to be able to summarize the text. In addition, after they've clarified the literal meaning, the summary they construct leads students to a description of the character's motivation.

Example 2

During a full group clarification of a section of text, the teacher prompted the students to read the notes at the side of the text to help them figure out what was happening.

1 Teacher: [reading line from text] Let me tell you Cassius, you yourself are much condemned to have an itching palm...Notes 10 and 11 give you clues to what Brutus is saying there.

Jabari: He is condemned for getting money for...

5 Abdi: You might sell your officers, your soldiers for money

Individual students continued to make comments to the full group, as Jabari and Abdi did above, but because pairs were still sitting together and continued to clarify meanings of words and lines in the text as they went, side conversations also occurred. For example, one member (Kristern) of the pair who was working initially in this example was having a conversation with her partner and a student from the pair in front of her regarding the meaning of “itching palm.” Bhawana (from the pair in front of Kristern) got Kristern’s attention and directed her to the side note for the definition of “itching palm.” Bhawana directed Kristern to the text in Nepali. Kristern responded to Bhawana’s directions by flipping to the note in the text, reading it again, and they continued their conversation about the meaning of “itching palm” in a combination of Nepali and English. In this case, the students’ collaboration around the meaning of the text was conducted in L1. These students drew their information not only from the notes in the text, but they employed their first language to further clarify what the meaning of the term was. When it came time to share out clarification for the meaning of the term, Bhawana and Kristern both offered responses to the question:

Teacher: What does it mean to have an itching palm?

Kristern: To get money

Bhawana: To want money¬ [overlapping speech]

Kristern: [smiling and nodding] To want money.

The exchange between Bhawana and Kristern, during which they clarified the meaning of the section of text, seemed to alleviate some of the frustration that Kristern

indicated in her comments about the reading task (Line 1). After the conversation with Bhawana, Kristern was nodding as answers were shared and also shared her own answer, based on her clarification. The students supported each other's meaning making by sharing their own use of cognitive strategies, as well as providing linguistic resources for one another in their home language.

Students' willingness to take responsibility for their own learning was seen through this example in their use of cognitive strategies: The students were willing to re-read, to use the footnotes and references in the text for clarification, and they were willing to provide support to one another in their home language in order to create additional clarification. The students' willingness to engage these cognitive strategies indicated a willingness to engage in the task of collaborative and individual meaning making, and demonstrated their ability to make meaning of the text.

Persistence

Example 1

In this example, two students were reading through a section of *Julius Caesar*. They were reading and stopping for clarification as they read. The task asked students to record, in their own words, elements of a conversation between Cassius and Brutus. Students were to record the conversation between the two characters in the text as it unfolded. They were completing a notetaker that asked them to write what Cassius said in the left hand column of their notetaker, and what Brutus said in the right hand column.

This example began with two students who were working to make meaning of the text.

1 Kristern: What's that mean?

Farida: [looking at the text that Kristern has just read and re-reading] Go/ to/ Go to. You are not Cassius.

Kristern: He is talking to Cassius right?

5 Farida: Yeah.

Kristern: But he say like-

Farida: But / I think it's because he's changing. Like. He's being too mean.

Like. They kill Caesar together and he's the one who encourage him that they can do something about Caesar. So he's changing his mind like he's not

10 involved..? He's not...

He's not... [Kristern nodding enthusiastically]

Kristern: Oh, he act a rude and nice like oh...

Farida: Yeah. I am... (reading)

On Line 2, Farida re-reads the line from the text and clarifies her understanding of the line for her partner. Kristern's confusion about the line, and Farida's clarification supported Kristern's enthusiasm for the reading (as seen on Line 11), and they were able to continue on. Five minutes after this exchange, Kristern turned the page to continue reading her part and said:

Kristern: We have to read this all?! ↑ (emphatic)

15 Farida: Kristern, calm down, we read, read, read... (lengthen)

Kristern: You're not my teacher. Like... We have to read all...

Farida: Yeah,

Kristern: which one?

Farida: Uhhh...this one... "You have done that you should be sorry for..."

[reading aloud from the text] We keep reading...oh my god...

Farida encourages Kristern to continue (Line 15), but expresses her own frustration with the length of the text on Line 20).

20 Kristern: Oh. "You have done that you should be sorry for..." [continues reading where Farida leaves off]

The students continued to read and discuss the meaning of the text for the next six minutes. During that time, they clarified the meaning of "flatterer" and continued their discussion of how Cassius was acting. When they completed the section they were assigned, Farida said:

Farida: Oh, yeah, we done. [pulls out notetaker and questions]

Oh...I forgot that part // reading was fun / I forgot that part.

Okay, what we writing about.

Farida and Kristern pulled their questions out and went back through the reading.

Throughout this example, it was clear that they had completed the reading, clarified meanings as they went, and as Farida's prompt on line 12 indicated, they planned to go back into the task and write responses to the guiding questions for the reading.

Despite the frustration with the length that both students expressed (Lines 14 and 20), Farida proclaimed (on Line 11) that "reading was fun," and the students persisted

with the reading task itself, and returned to the written response task in the end. The participation structure that the students were engaged in created a space for them to make a decision about whether or not to persist with the task. These students chose to do so. This vacillation between frustration and persistence is also seen in the following example.

Example 2

In this example, Farida called the teacher over, and the teacher sat down and worked through the section of text with Farida as she read through it.

1 Farida: [reading] I don't know how to read this word...

Teacher: In awe

Farida: [continues reading] In awe of such a thing as myself / is the main point?

Farida is willing to read on to see if she can figure out the passage without necessarily having to know every word.

Teacher: I think if you keep going, / that that will be the main point.

5 Farida: To all the way here? ñ [points with pen in text]

Farida indicated that the length of what she thought the teacher was asking her to read was too intimidating.

Teacher: Nonononono. Just to here [points to line in text]

Farida: I was born as free as Caesar so were [pronounced where] you / we both have faith?

Teacher: mhm

10 Farida: as we and we can both endu.. / I don't know this word / endure

Teacher: mhm

Farida: the win / winter cold as well as he /

Teacher: Yeah. So what is he saying there?

Farida: again I have to read? ← [overlapping speech]

15 Farida: They both the same.

On Line 14, Farida asked whether she needed to read through again at the same time the teacher posed a question. Once she processed the teacher's question (asked on Line 13), she responded with a correct interpretation of the scene on Line 15.

Teacher: Yes.

Despite having struggled with the oral reading, Farida was able to draw the meaning from the text. In the passage she was reading, Cassius was trying to convince Brutus that both Brutus and Caesar were equals, so there was no reason Caesar should be king and Brutus not. Farida's statement on Line 15 that "They both the same" indicated that she drew this conclusion from the text after re-reading the section of text.

Farida: And they both I mean he says he was born to be free.

Teacher: Right.

Farida: So

20 Teacher: And so what is Caesar wanting to do now?

Farida: // ahhh... [wondering]

Teacher: They were all born free and then the same, but now Caesar is going to be...

Farida: No idea miss.

25 Teacher: Yeah yeah. Earlier. Why is the crowd so excited. Caesar came back and what were they going to do for him?

Farida: I don't know. // I don't know miss.

The teacher points to the line in the text , and Farida re-reads the section.

Farida: [reading] Uhhh...Caesar XX For the king?

Teacher: Mmm...

30 Farida: Ahhh

Teacher: So how does that change. We were all born the same but now the people...

Farida: The people choose Caesar / for the king. I think they gonna be enemy? I think they're going to be in trouble? Somewhere somehow.

Farida has pulled together the two sections of text that she has just read to draw this conclusion. She persisted through her early frustration (Line 5), and except for a couple of "I don't get it miss" or "No idea" statements, showed little frustration. At no point was there an indication that she would just stay in the place of "I don't get it" and give up.

Discussion

The routines for the small group interactions remained consistent throughout the reading of *Julius Caesar*. Students took up the tasks and responded to the supports provided in varying ways. Data indicated that students did develop an awareness of times they were confused and times when they felt confident in their answers. This metacognitive awareness supported students' ability to engage independently in their

reading process. This engagement with the text was indicated through the students' use of cognitive strategies, including questioning, summarizing, and the clarification of their ideas. These strategies occurred as they continued to read on and to not give up on the reading process. This progression, however, was not linear, and students requested and were offered different levels of support throughout the reading tasks. Students moved back and forth between confirming ideas and making observations about their ideas. Varying amounts of scaffolding were provided (through task design, teacher talk, or students' collaboration) depending on the difficulty of the task and the proficiencies of the group. Through these tasks, and their willingness to engage them, students reached agreements about literal meanings, developed responses to the text as a result of these understandings, and voiced opinions as they engaged in literary discussion. These conversations were examples of disciplinary discourse, in addition to students exploring their own reading processes and approaches for making meaning. The tasks the students engaged in offered spaces for both literal and literary understandings of the text.

Students' construction of meaning and engagement with the task was apparent in each of the different literary practices described in this chapter (metacognitive awareness, cognitive strategy use, and persistence). The classroom context and the participation structures the students engaged in allowed for meaning of the complex text to be constructed by the students. As seen in the examples, however, these practices that emerged in the students' talk are not discrete from one another. Metacognitive awareness, and the students' identification of spaces in the text where they were confused allowed them to more strategically use cognitive strategies.

Additionally, these practices were not engaged in a vacuum. There was time and space created for the practices to occur. The participation structures of the classroom created space for students to engage in meaning making, which necessitated that they clarify their understanding of the text. Students had regular and ongoing opportunities to discuss the text they were reading in pairs and small groups. Within these groupings, students took time to clarify unfamiliar vocabulary, used these clarifications to explain literal meanings of the text, and once they had clarified the literal meaning, were able to make inferences, which led to more literary conversations. These conversations included students' analysis of character motivation or cause and effect in the plot. How students reacted to the participation structures and tasks of the classroom indicated their responsibility for their own learning and their growth toward independence with the meaning making. Because disciplinary knowledge is primarily produced through language, the opportunity to use language in these literary conversations supported students' disciplinary learning.

Metacognitive Awareness

In the first example, Malika posed a specific question requesting clarification for a confusion she had as she was reading. She pointed to the text and requested assistance from the teacher. Both Malika's identification of her confusion, and her identification of the specific place in the text that was causing her confusion, indicated her metacognitive awareness.

Students' close reading processes were related to students' ability to engage practices that allowed them to clarify word level confusions and develop independence

and persistence with their own learning. Without this opportunity to read closely for meaning, the opportunity to engage the practices that were indicated in the data would not have been possible. Students' abilities to move to disciplinary ways of thinking and learning despite word level struggles with text indicated that close reading offered multiple entry points for meaning making, and that with the development of these levels of persistence with text, students could develop more complex understandings. In the example of Malika and Saada, students' practices during the close reading process allowed them to move through a literal understanding to more complex literary understandings of text. The students' metacognitive awareness provided opportunities to identify roadblocks for comprehension, and to problem-solve accordingly.

In the second example, the students worked together through different processes: making meaning of the text, clarifying their understanding of a question asked in the task, and shifting their engagement with one another. The students' shifts in participation during this example provided an illustration of how students' participation within a task can shift and change even as the supports remain the same. Saada's decision to return to the task and work with her partner indicated that she saw value in the partnership. Saada's statement on Line 35, "Do you need help?" followed by "She's like, of course, girl, I'm your partner. What kind of stupid question is that?" (Line 37) indicated that Saada did believe that the partner work was of benefit, and that by having made the decision to not participate, she was not helping. This indicated that the students were aware of the purpose for the participation structure they were working in—that it was not

simply a grouping structure, but that they understood that they were to support one another's meaning making.

In the third example, the students were able to refine their area of confusion in order to solicit the teacher's help more effectively. The students' ability and willingness to identify their confusions also led to the teacher being able to offer increased support. The students took up the processes modeled by the teacher and, in the end, were able to draw conclusions about the meaning of the text. This example provided an illustration of how important it was for students to have time to be able to work through a text. It also indicated the importance of the ability of students to identify roadblocks and confusions in the text, to allow them to ask targeted questions of each other and the teacher. Inherent in these ideas are Vygotsky's (1978) theories regarding language as a social endeavor. Through these social endeavors, the role of student talk was foregrounded in the representative examples to offer a view of how students interacted with text and one another when they were given the opportunity to.

Cognitive Strategy Use

The examples in this section provided what Walqui (2006) described as the process in which "skills and knowledge are transformed from the social to the cognitive plane." Students were engaged in social practices and classroom discourse, and they engaged in literary tasks and discussions that supported their use of cognitive strategies. Participation structures and classroom tasks necessitated the use of these cognitive strategies for meaning making, and provided opportunities for students to share their processes as they engaged the strategies that supported them (both with and without the

teacher's support). This public space for students' voices provided opportunity for "dialogically organized instruction" (Nystrand et al, 2003). The dialogic conversations that students engaged in led them from practices they engaged to make meaning, to literary conversations that drew on these literal understandings.

The examples of literacy development through cognitive strategy use in this study are embedded within the social context that gave rise to them. The first example, in which students combined their own ideas about the text to create a cohesive summary of events, demonstrated the role of small group conversation in making meaning of text. Because these types of summaries were a part of the task the students had been asked to do, they were able to summarize individual portions of the text to complete the task. In the second example, the students re-read text for additional clarification, and also used the footnotes.

Persistence

The examples provided in this section illustrated both frustration and students' abilities to overcome frustration and to persist with challenging tasks. In the first example in this section, Farida encouraged Kristern to read further on in the text (Line 15) and they did. Farida's encouragement, as part of the collaboration she engaged in, supported her partner in persisting with the task. In the second example, the teacher worked with Farida through a section of text. Farida was willing to re-read, but expressed frustration with the length on Line 5. Despite this frustration, she continued reading. In this example, Farida had identified her confusion, asked questions as she read, and also drew a conclusion at the end of the speech that she wasn't able to after her

first read. This example indicated, however, that this student who was at times confident in her reading could become frustrated by text length.

In these examples, students' persistence indicated a willingness to take ownership of their own learning through their decisions to continue reading and working through the text. The students drew upon their metacognitive awareness and cognitive strategy use as they persisted with the text. Students' metacognitive awareness, as seen in the first section of this chapter, enabled them to identify spaces in the text where they experienced confusion and to seek support. Their ability to employ cognitive strategies to help them make meaning of the text (whether independently or guided by a teacher or more experienced peer) also supported their willingness. The tasks were rituals (Au, 2008) that had been developed to support students in working with the text to make meaning, drawing conclusions and developing strategies to do this more independently.

Conclusion

These examples add to the extant research by providing an inside look at how ELL high school students engage complex literary text when offered instruction that provides spaces and opportunities for literary conversations. In all, these examples provided a description of how students engaged with complex text and used practices to construct meaning. Further, these examples describe the supports in place for students to move toward greater independence as readers. This study extends the research by providing an illustration of what students do when they are offered the space to make meaning of challenging text. It provides an illustration of practices students might engage in when they are afforded the opportunity. Much of the work on scaffolding and

providing supports for students indicates that there needs to be a gradual release of responsibility (Vygotsky, 1978), but previous studies have not provided a close look at students' uptake of processes when they are asked to be responsible for their own meaning making.

In this chapter, the examples of students' engagement with the literacy tasks foregrounded the students' talk; the teacher talk included in the examples was most often in a support role, providing scaffolding (van Lier, 2004) for the students' conversations: re-reading text for students (so they could hear it being fluently read and hear correct pronunciation of vocabulary and characters' names); posing questions for students to respond to that will surface additional insights and clarification, and also questions that push the students to draw conclusions that push them from literal understandings of text to more literary conversations. For example, in the conversation with Farida in the second example in this section, the teacher provided encouragement on Line 6 when she asked the student to re-read to a certain point in the text, and prompted the student to draw conclusions on Line 13.

In contrast to previous studies of students' engagement in literary discussion (Ivey & Broaddus, 2007; Lee, 2007) this classroom did not rely solely on curricular decisions to support students' entry into and engagement with the discourse. The classroom in this study was set up to support students' engagement in the close reading of text that would support their ability to engage the discourse of the literary conversations. This study extended the findings surrounding supports that needed to be in place for students to engage in meaning making (Langer, Bartolome, Vasquez & Lucas, 1990) and looked

more closely at strategies students used for engaging and making meaning of text in a context in which the recommended supports existed. My study extended the findings in previous literature by providing enacted examples of students' participation in literary conversations surrounding an assigned text. This study provided an illustration of students' talk as they enacted tasks presented to them, the ways they engaged in meaning making, and the strategies they enlisted.

In effect, this focus on output and classroom discourse shaped and was shaped by the context of this classroom, and by the students' participation. The themes and patterns that emerged in the findings regarding classroom context, indicated that the time for meaning making and the collaborative structures in the classroom were related to the students' behaviors that led to students' increasingly independent participation with classroom task.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

Several years ago I was inspired by an article by Ball and Forzani (2007) that asked the question: “What makes educational research ‘educational?’” (p. 529). Their answer was that it was necessary to study the “instructional dynamic” (p. 530)—a dynamic that includes relationships among students, between teachers and students, between students and content, between teachers and content, *and* the effect of the learning environment on all of these factors. As a researcher, it was difficult to tease out ways to construct data collection and analysis that would get to the heart of these complex themes and questions. This dynamism was what I hoped to capture in the context of this study and was inherent in the question I asked: What is the role of student talk in the enactment of literary conversations and literacy practices in a classroom designed for “engaged academic literacy” (Schoenbach & Greenleaf, 2009)?

As Rex and Schiller (2009) highlighted, “The researchers have been helpful at telling us what to do, but not so good at explaining how to do it. Particularly where talk is concerned...” (p. 8). Because my lived experience as a teacher and a scholar led me to this same conclusion, this study was intended to provide additional insight into what emerged in students’ discussions about literature, thereby providing additional research that illustrated possibilities for what might arise when these opportunities exist in classrooms.

Summary

Sociocultural approaches toward literacy practices, and, in particular, development of literacy for English Language Learners, informed the research design of this study. The influences of both Bakhtin and Vygotsky, who, in their respective fields, shifted the focus of research on language acquisition from input to output, heavily influenced my decision to focus on students' talk in the classroom. Studies that have built on this theoretical framework have been attentive to teachers' practices, and these studies have provided valuable insights into how teachers might create contexts in which students learn best. What was essential to this study was how students' talk indicated their participation within the classroom context of this research study.

In Chapter 2, I outlined and described many of the studies that were grounded in a sociocultural framework. Consistent recommendations for teacher practice emerged throughout these studies. These recommendations included: curricular choices and selection of texts to support students' learning (Lee, 2007; Ivey & Broaddus, 2007); instructional approaches for effective literacy learning (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand & Gamoran, 2003; Langer 2001); opportunities for students to engage in discussion (Alvermann & Hayes, 1989; Almasi, O'Flavin & Arya, 2001); and recommendations for dialogism and effective use of questioning in classroom discussions (Nystrand, 1997; Nystrand & Gamoran, 2003; Nystrand et al, 2003). Studies that focused specifically on English Language Learners echoed these recommendations (Applebee et al, 2003; Helmar-Salasoo, 2002; Valdes, 1998).

This study added to the previous research by taking a close look at how students engaged in these discussions in a classroom that followed the recommendations in the literature. Previous studies focused on teaching practices that led to effective literacy contexts, which were designed to engage students in literacy discussions, whereas my study focused on the students' discourse as they engaged in carrying out those practices. This qualitative case study examined students' participation in literary discussions in a high school English language development classroom. Because the literature that came before indicated that students' discussion about literature led to effective literacy practices, the focus of my study was on the practices students engaged to better understand how these practices emerged during literacy tasks.

The research question focused on students' talk as they enacted the literary conversations in the classroom: What is the role of student talk in the enactment of literary conversations and literacy practices in a classroom designed for "engaged academic literacy" (Schoenbach & Greenleaf, 2009)? Students' talk indicated that their practices included: metacognitive awareness, cognitive strategy use, and persistence with difficult text. The talk that indicated these practices emerged in the collaborative conversations students engaged in while making meaning of and discussing the assigned text.

The students' metacognitive awareness was indicated by their ability to identify roadblocks in the text, and to articulate the places in the text where these roadblocks were occurring. The confusions and clarifications were made public as a result of the collaborative participation structures. These patterns of engagement made it apparent

that students' opportunity to collaboratively make meaning and jointly respond to the text created a context for students to share confusions, clarify these confusions, seek specific support from the teacher, and offer support to one another.

The students' use of cognitive strategies indicated that students were able to not only surface their confusions, but also use strategies to solve confusions. The cognitive strategies included the following: drawing conclusions about the text, summarizing key ideas, clarifying meaning of sections of text, and using home language and text features as supports for meaning making. Students regularly asked questions and made clarifications as they read through the text.

Additionally, students exhibited persistence throughout their reading process. Although students' talk indicated that they believed the text was difficult, they did not give up on the reading. Nor did they give up on the assigned tasks that were to be completed as they read. Students' talk with one another indicated that they saw the value in the collaboration and used each other as resources. One student's perception of the value of collaboration in this classroom was illustrated in a statement made by Saada during a full-group discussion. In response to the question, "Who has the power in this classroom?" Saada emphatically answered: "We all have the power in this room. We all have the power in this room because we work together and teach each other."

Discussion

This study focused on how students took up practices as they collaboratively worked to make meaning of complex text. These conversations and these practices were

grounded in the social structures of the classroom. The discourse that students engaged made evident particular literacy practices, and these practices suggested students' increasing willingness to take control of their own meaning making and their reading process. What became apparent was that the meaning making conversations were necessary for students to have before they were able to engage in more literary discussions.

Students' willingness to engage with this text, and their development of practices, which allowed them to take control of their reading process, in relation to this text, demonstrated multiple expressions of literate currency in this classroom setting. *Julius Caesar* may not seem like a relevant curricular choice for a classroom of English Language Learners from around the world. This text, because of its prominence in "mainstream" English curriculum, allowed students the opportunity to develop confidence and proficiency with a text that is a part of the discipline, as established in secondary English curriculum. Students bring literate currency from their out-of-school contexts that can be drawn on, particularly when reading texts that address universal themes, as does *Julius Caesar*.

The curricular choice made in this classroom, to focus on a traditionally core text in mainstream English classrooms was intentional. I could not, in good conscience, as an educator, offer students (who I saw were brilliant thinkers) only the opportunity to read short (and more often than not, abridged) versions of texts, which would not provide them with similar experiences to their peers in "higher track" classrooms. In a system where students were segregated by proficiency level or level of language acquisition at

the macro-level, it was impossible for students to not be aware of the stigma associated with this categorization. Students who are positioned by the school system as “less capable” by virtue of their test scores, need to not only have opportunities to appropriate skills and strategies that will allow them membership into the mainstream curriculum, but opportunities to do so in relation to genuinely challenging curriculum. The findings from this study illustrated possibilities for what students can and will do when they encounter a challenging text, even the less-experienced readers.

Lee’s (2007) recommendation that teachers “create routines for face-to-face interactions that create meaningful problem-solving roles for students and a variety of safety nets that encourage them to take intellectual risks” was addressed as students worked collaboratively with peers to make meaning of text. Because reading was defined and established as a problem solving activity in this classroom, the students had the opportunity to develop skills and strategies for making meaning of complex texts. This routine of independently reading text, without expecting a teacher to provide immediate clarification for the meaning of the text, was one way in which students were positioned as capable, and another way that they were willing to take intellectual risks. How students took these intellectual risks was explicated in my study.

The very act of engaging with a complex text and attempting to work with a peer to draw meaning from that text was an intellectual risk for inexperienced readers. However, the complex text, coupled with the students’ willingness to engage in the tasks that accompanied it, provided students the opportunity to become more experienced readers. Therein lies the catch: less-experienced readers are often protected from having to read

complex texts, and the teachers often do the work of meaning-making for students, and students remain inexperienced (Schoenbach, Greenleaf & Murphy, 2012).

The conversations that students had were not necessarily illustrative of the types of deep literary conversations that are the focus of Lee's (2007) Cultural Modeling Curriculum. She focused on areas of the discipline of literary analysis that are important to the discipline (i.e., discussion of irony, satire, unreliable narration, etc.), and ways of building activities that lead students to connect their lived experiences with these elements of literature as they surface in canonical texts. The heuristics Lee developed to help students read in those ways were important. What lies behind this ability to engage in literary discourse, however, and what was examined in my study, were the structures in place to allow students to develop their ability to read closely and carefully to make literal meanings first, then extend the understanding so they could identify aspects of characterization and plot development, and begin to analyze the ways in which an author presents a story to the reader. What I provided students was an entry point to begin reading texts where those types of conversations might be possible. Students were provided with opportunities to engage and make meaning of text, to develop arguments and personal responses to the text. Unless we study how students engage with and make meaning of complex texts, what the process of close reading and meaning making might look like in certain situations, we will never know what opportunities to offer students.

Instead of frontloading ideas about how literature was to be read, the instructional routines in this class engaged students with close reading processes, and helped them develop the confidence and stamina to begin to work through texts in productive ways,

first at a literal level of understanding, and then through opportunities to generate and substantiate claims about what was occurring in the text. An emphasis on reading effectively, and making meaning of complex text was an integral part of students' experiences. These opportunities to generate and substantiate claims about the text led to students analyzing the reliability of a narrator, possible plot configurations, and themes that surfaced in the literature.

Implications

Research. There are a number of spaces in the literature that could be forwarded by additional studies regarding students' uptake of literacy practices. Additional research about student participation in academic classrooms would allow greater insights into how students respond to different pedagogical and curricular approaches. Research that provides additional analysis of student performance data in relation to classroom participation structures would also add to the literature. I do think the role of mixed-methods studies in relation to students' participation (Nystrand et al, 2003) could provide important data and analysis that cannot be reached through a case study. Individual case studies of student learners, particularly students for who reasons for struggles with language are not apparent, would also be extremely valuable. The relationship between students' literacy practices and the relationship to language acquisition would be an additional area of study that could add to the research.

Formative and Design experiments (Reinking & Bradley, 2008) could further explicate the theories that have been developed and examine the pedagogical approaches

that are characteristic of the theoretical frames that informed this study. Formative and design methodology and a focus on the interdependence of variables, that could also help shed light on the complexity of classroom contexts, would also be useful. These experiments would provide additional insight into the continual shifts and growth in teacher practice with a close look at the resultant student practice as it continues to unfold over a period of time. Studies that might allow us to examine both continual shifts in teacher practice and the relationship to students' participation would be particularly useful.

Additional analysis of the data I've collected for this study, in particular a close analysis of moment-to-moment interactions during the literacy events I've analyzed, would provide additional insights into classroom participation. I would also like to specifically examine the role of questioning as it occurred in this classroom, including who is asking questions, what these questions are intended to do, and the role questions serve in the reading process. This could extend previous research (Nystrand et al, 2003) by providing insight into how these questioning practices are engaged by students in small group conversations. Nystrand et al's (2003) study focused on the "importance of understanding teacher and student behaviors as reflected in the questions they pose as a dynamic process..." (p. 191). These researchers provided attention to how teachers structure discussion, but there is additional room for investigating how students' take up these practices and engage in them in increasingly independent participation structures (i.e., small group or paired conversations). There is a lot that remains to be learned about students' participation and practices surrounding literacy, and designing studies

that focus on the enactment of these practices, in a wide variety of settings and in varying content areas or disciplines will support our continued learning as a field.

Instruction and curriculum. Instructional implications are indicated in the results from the present study. The framing of tasks and the participation structures students engaged in provided them with opportunities to develop more experience with complex texts and tasks. Students' opportunities to try to make meaning on their own, with partners, and small groups allowed them to continually engage the literacy practices that they did. Students' practices indicated they had developed a definition for reading in which the goal was to make meaning, and that they were able to identify places where this meaning making was disrupted.

These participation structures also included multiple and varied entry points to make contributions to classroom discourse, and this created opportunities for students to engage in the discourse of the classroom. Students were offered opportunities for independent reflection, small group and pair discussion, and opportunities to participate in full group conversations. Students were willing to share their confusions and viewpoints about the text, and took up the position of capable meaning makers. For example, students read and made meaning of texts in pairs and small groups. They were asked to come to agreement on literal meanings of the text, and also to develop inferences based on these literal meanings. The data indicated that students could make meaning of challenging text when provided the opportunity to do so. The implications for curricular decisions are multiple: Is it possible that English Language Learners do not need to be segregated from mainstream academic content as they work to acquire English? If

students are capable of making meaning of challenging text, then how might this inform how we design learning contexts? As Moore and Cunningham (2007) stated: “Educators need not work to create agency. Youth already enact agency, with or without permission of instruction. Educators who acknowledge this condition support youths’ wise use of this power...adolescents choose whether or not to read, write, and participate in school” (p. 141-142). It is our responsibility, as researchers, to examine ways that instruction is organized and offer curriculum that positions students as capable, and offers them opportunities for close reading of text, so they are able to develop practices and strategies for meaning making.

Professional development and teacher education. Both the curricular and instructional implications above could inform both professional learning experiences for in-service and pre-service teacher education. Teacher education courses, particularly methods courses, would benefit pre-service teachers (and their future students) if they provided additional opportunities to discuss the rationale for developing a repertoire of ways to support student talk in the classroom. The case remains that many of our pre-service teachers will teach in the ways they were taught, there is a slim chance that they are familiar with or comfortable with the idea of a classroom where students’ voices are the central focus. This is even truer when we ask them to consider work with students who have not been traditionally successful in schools.

Professional development for in-service teachers is especially important. Christoph and Nystrand’s (2001) case study of one long-term teacher who was attempting to shift her practice to a more dialogic approach indicated that it’s not necessarily that

teachers do not want to have or do not value discussion, it is a matter of not wanting to shift a repertoire of teaching strategies they are accustomed to. Professional development opportunities that are carefully scaffolded for teachers, to allow them to inquire into the role of discussion in their classrooms, and to have the opportunity to expand their instructional repertoire, could have a powerful effect. As Nystrand (1997) stated, “To mitigate the inequality that results from grouping and tracking, teachers and students in regular and low-level classes need higher expectations and more engaging discourse that focuses on academic subject matter” (p. 64). However, he adds, “what ultimately counts is the extent to which instruction requires students to think, not just report someone else’s thinking” (p. 72). If the social structure of the classroom is set up to create tasks that ask students to think, they can become increasingly acclimated to this expectation, but it does not mean, especially for students for whom this is a new experience, they will all immediately engage in the process.

Conclusion

Throughout this study, the focus on students’ talk was central. The idea that students have the capacity to teach us the most about the work that we, as researchers and teachers do, seems obvious, but remains underrepresented in the research literature. The instructional dynamic that Ball and Forzani (2007) indicated was the key to research that is educational, continues to frame my future considerations for research. What can we learn from the students in our classrooms? What contexts provide students with opportunities to become increasingly independent readers and learners? What relationships between members in classrooms support participation within these

contexts? What do we learn from students' meaning making and literary conversations that can provide insight into how we might structure learning experiences to lead them deeper into the disciplinary ways of thinking? This study makes a small but important contribution to understanding the complexities of high school, English language learners engaging with complex texts during literary conversations. Studies such as this one are likely to provide insights teachers and researchers can use to provide meaningful instruction. Listening closely to students' voices provides insight into the complexities inherent in the instructional dynamic.

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