More than print: The home and school literacies of three fourth-graders

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More than print: The home and school literacies of three fourth-graders

Voss, Margaret M., Ph.D.
University of New Hampshire, 1992

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MORE THAN PRINT:
THE HOME AND SCHOOL LITERACIES
OF THREE FOURTH-GRADERS

BY

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B. A., University of Rochester, 1969
M.Ed., Boston University, 1973

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Reading and Writing Instruction

December, 1992
This dissertation has been examined and approved.

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Nov. 16, 1997
Date
DEDICATION

For my family,

and especially my parents,

Muriel and Thomas Bouley,

first-rate teachers

at home and at school
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could not have done this work without the support and influence -- direct and indirect -- of many others.

I have been immensely fortunate to be part of a vital, forward-looking, nurturing community at the University of New Hampshire. The members of my doctoral committee practice what they teach; they challenged me, responded to me, and gave me space to make my own discoveries. Don Graves, my Dissertation Director, influenced my thinking and my teaching long before I joined the program at the university. He helped me to see the particulars without losing sight of the big picture, the "what's it for." He has challenged me with his questions, inspired me with his observations, and encouraged me with his faith in my work. I have grown under his guidance.

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stories has strengthened my understanding and broadened my view of literacies and of home/school relationships. I hope the families have learned and benefitted from our relationship as much as I have. They are the heart of this work; I will not forget them.

My family has not only stood beside me but has taught me to see and appreciate a range of literacies and perspectives. My husband John plays many roles in my life. As my personal computer consultant, he has averted more than one technical disaster. Sometimes he has been a dispassionate critic, challenging me to explain and clarify my ideas. Sometimes he has been a collaborator, bringing his art and business backgrounds into our late-night discussions to help me see in new ways. On too many weekends, he has played single parent to Nathaniel to give me time to write. Always, he has been a believer in the importance of my work and has been a tremendous support to me.

My children have taught me more than they know. I appreciate the interest Deirdre and Jed have shown in my work; they act as proud of me as I am of them. Nathaniel not only played legos for hours, giving me time to work, but he also seemed to have the knack of knowing just when I needed to be pulled away for a game or a story or a hug. Just by being there, he reminds me of the most important things.

I dedicate this work to my family — John, Deirdre, Jed, and Nathaniel. And I also dedicate it to my parents, Muriel and Thomas Bouley. As parents they taught me many things. As educators, they showed me what dedication is. Their literacies -- both as parents and as teachers -- have had a strong and lasting impact on mine.
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ABSTRACT

MORE THAN PRINT:

THE HOME AND SCHOOL LITERACIES OF THREE FOURTH-GRADERS

by

Margaret M. Voss
University of New Hampshire, December, 1992

Through ethnographic case studies of three fourth-grade children, this study investigates the relationships between children's home and school literacies. The data were collected through participant-observation in the children's homes and at school; interviews of children, parents, and teacher; and analysis of children's products and processes (such as written work and hand-made crafts).

The study defines a literacy as a meaning-making system which can be used functionally, communicatively, reflectively, flexibly, and pleasurably. Schools typically focus on print literacy and do not always recognize or value the range of literacies children bring with them from home. This research shows children using not only print literacy, but interactive and mechanical literacies, among others. It suggests that children acquire literacies informally, in context, and through interaction. The findings suggest that schools broaden their concept of a "literate environment" to include more than print and to promote interactive ways of working -- to become "learning homes" where children's home literacies are used in meaningful ways -- both for their own value and as bridges to other literacies.
CONFESSIONS, QUESTIONS, CONNECTIONS

A Researcher's Home

My house is a mess. Trudging in with an armload of groceries, I step around the mail on the floor (courtesy of our old-fashioned mail slot), as Nathaniel, my eight-year old scoots around me, rushing to turn on "Where in the World is Carmen San Diego?" on PBS. I set the groceries down to sort the mail -- the usual computer magazines and business mail for my husband, coupons, bills, a letter from a colleague, Nat's Ranger Rick, and a note from Deirdre, our oldest, who lives in a distant city.

Still laden with bundles and now clutching envelopes, as well, I head for the kitchen. As I sweep past the refrigerator, two of the alphabet magnets come tumbling down, along with one of Nathaniel's illustrated stories. The artwork lands on the floor next to a Lego catalogue Nat was reading at breakfast, dreaming of his next purchase. I glance around, wondering where to put the groceries.

There's no space on the table. Sections of a couple newspapers are strewn around, along with the Time magazine that came yesterday. Jed, our nineteen-year old lives at home and attends the local college; this dismemberment of the newspapers is his handiwork. I can't put the groceries on Nat's child-sized table; it's overburdened with his markers, paper, and schoolwork. On the counter, along with
the breakfast dishes, are a couple of phone messages Jed scrawled on scraps of paper, the school notices that came home yesterday, and a paperback novel. The only clear surfaces are the kitchen chairs, so I set my bags there. As I start to unpack, Nat wanders in looking for a snack. He notices the Rice Krispies package sticking out of a bag and checks the back of the package for information about the toy inside. As he reads, I marvel at how surrounded we are by print. In the battle between me and paper for an uncluttered house, the paper is clearly triumphant.

Though I rant at the clutter (what my friend Dorothy calls "the paper monster"), I doubt I could live without it. Letters and messages keep me close to friends and family, newspapers and magazines keep me informed about the rest of the world, books keep me connected to ideas and meanings, and all the other stuff -- from brochures to recipes -- helps me negotiate my path(s) through life. Print has helped Nathaniel, too. I've been informally studying his literacy development since he was three (to his father's somewhat bemused dismay), and I'm certain that the prevalence of a variety of written material has enriched his understandings of many things -- from facts about rocks to motivations of characters (and real people) -- and has helped him move joyfully into reading and writing.

**A Teacher's Questions**

But even as I and my family revel in print, I remember the students I had in many years as a sixth grade teacher and writing specialist, and I ask a teacher's question: how is it for other families? What kinds of clutter fill the corners of other people's (my students') lives? How do other families use print? And perhaps more
significantly, what non-print activities do other families (and their children) do? What meanings do they create from their experiences?

In all my years of teaching, these questions lurked in the back of my mind. I was interested in my students, and I tried to get to know them. I sought ways to involve students, including those who stay on the periphery, to invite them in to the literate community. Early in my career, Donald Murray's work (1969) taught me the value of responsive conferences throughout the writing process; later I learned to offer students topic choice and other decisions about their own work. Writing became an avenue to success and fulfillment for many of my students. Reading was more problematic. Basals were the center of most reading programs then, and I sought ways to make the stories meaningful to children. We also read novels and did many projects about the things we read. Sometimes children were hooked, but usually good readers continued to love to read, while poor readers continued to struggle. Meanwhile, I learned a little about my students, mostly through their writing, but never enough.

In recent years, the questions have become even more pressing. As I've realized the importance of background knowledge and experiences and how they set the foundation for new knowledge and learning, I've wondered about all the background knowledge that students bring from home that I and other teachers never reach. I've known all along that the students who struggle in school are not stupid and are seldom lazy. They are discouraged and they lack confidence. Often, they come from non-mainstream backgrounds. I noted this in the upper middle class community where I taught for most of my career and in the varied communities,
including inner cities, in which I have done consulting for the past several years. But I realize I still know very little about the literacies children experience at home. And I know I cannot assume that my middle class ways match the ways of my students. Shirley Brice Heath's study of Trackton and Roadville (1983) brought home that point dramatically. None of us can assume that other people's "ways with words" mirror our own. And we can't assume that ours is the "right" way, but only that it is our way or, in the case of most schools and teachers, the mainstream way.

Then again, what is "the mainstream way?" Even within mainstream homes, there is no doubt tremendous variety in the ways people are literate. Perhaps each family has its own culture, its own "ways with words" and with learning -- its own set of strengths, interests, and aptitudes. I keep wondering, what if we could connect to the things our students children do know? What if schoolwork could celebrate their interests and talents and backgrounds, instead of divorcing them from them? So my question becomes: how can I find out about my students' home literacies, their ways of learning, their talents and interests? How can I reach into homes to link them and our schools closer together?

A Parent's Realization

Those questions led to this study. I tried to talk myself out of a topic in which I had to enter so many worlds -- schoolroom, children's lives, their homes, their parents' lives. With all the pressures I face -- home and family, a teaching assistantship, consulting work -- why, I asked myself, couldn't I choose something easier? There are so many interesting and important things to learn in the classroom
itself. Why complicate things by adding multiple research sites, other people's homes, to my study and my life?

But I wanted to know. I could not talk myself out of studying home/school literacy relationships. The topic seemed too important. Not until several months into my work did I realize why it meant so much to me. That's when I discovered it was not only my teaching that had inspired it. My own children had led me to my topic.

It struck me one day when someone asked about my research and I found myself talking about my son, Jed. As I explained that I was looking at the relationships between home and school literacies, I used Jed as an example. I told how Jed never really seemed to connect with school, though he went through the motions and was successful enough. Home was such a contrast. There, he was always invested in learning new things. From an early age, he loved to act. He had a huge chest of costumes and he'd dress up and play at various roles, sweeping through the house in his black cape. Later he and his friend played dungeons and dragons, writing and taping scripts, working for hours in Jed's room. Jed taught himself to play the guitar, to compose songs, to make cartoons, to paint. I wonder if any of his teachers knew about his rich creative life at home. With the exception of a couple of teachers who inspired him, school was not a place to use his creativity.

My story about Jed led me to talk about his sister Deirdre, who was always a fine student but who never displayed her artistic gifts in school. Then, I mentioned Nathaniel. Much younger than his siblings, his school seems more attuned to children's varied interests, but I wonder if that will continue as he progresses through the grades. Already, I wish for more fine arts.
No wonder the question of home and school literacies has nagged at me so for the past several years. When I became a parent (ten years ago, when John and the two older children became my family), I started to see children's learning from a new vantage point. I understood how important are the experiences and literacies children have outside of the classroom. As I saw for myself how schools missed important information about my children's strengths, I wondered about the students I never reached. I remembered Michael, who knew about whales and wrote a series of pieces about them. When he finally exhausted that topic, he did little else the rest of the year. I pictured Chris, a poor reader, quiet, withdrawn, and with little self-esteem. Yes, she may have had family problems and needed counseling, which the school was providing. But she also no doubt had some strengths that remained hidden from me. And there were others who knew fishing or car repair or painting, but who had difficulty writing and reading. If I had known more about their home interests and literacies, could I have helped them more?

When I thought about my children, I remembered, too, the year I taught in a Talented and Gifted program. Students identified as "academically talented" came to my resource room for two two-hour periods a week, and during much of that time they worked on individual projects based on their interests. They created real products for real audiences, and their work was outstanding. Jason campaigned to save the seals by researching the issue, giving speeches to other classes in the school, and organizing a letter-writing campaign. Amy studied American Sign Language and planned and prepared a highly enjoyable party for our class and children from the local School for the Deaf. Someone else learned photography and prepared a photo
essay for the bulletin board in the lobby, while another made a ship model to scale under the direction of a local boat-builder. I did not continue teaching in that program, partly because I wanted to try to do those kinds of projects with all students. As I came to my dissertation research, I realized those feelings, along with all my other teacherly and parental questions, had influenced my topic choice. The specific question, however, came into focus only after I entered the field.

**Connections**

When I began planning my dissertation, I knew that my territory would be home and school literacy relationships, but I had not yet identified the particular questions that would come to drive my study. At first, I intended to investigate teacher's, students', and parents' perceptions of literacy events in school. How did each person see things? What were their understandings of others' perceptions? I did a pilot study which showed me that I had been thinking too narrowly. I needed to find out not only everyone's differing versions of school events, but their impressions of home literacy, as well.

Soon I realized that perceptions were only part of the issue. What I really wanted to know was, "What are the relationships between children's literacy at home and at school?" I planned to focus on reading and writing in both home and school settings. Within two months, as I began research in a fourth grade class, the question expanded subtly one more time as I realized how many literacies I was seeing -- not just reading and writing, but other ways of knowing and relating.

I began to realize that my case study children knew many things that were not clearly visible in school. Kelly used television and videos not only for passive
relaxation, but for learning and socializing. Eric knew how to use a wide variety of tools and could build things with wood. I saw that the ways the children used talk differed from each other. I began to understand that children had multiple literacies, some of which did not depend on print, but all of which were systems of meaning-making.

It was around this time that I found myself speaking about my own children and their varied literacies, and realizing how my interests as a teacher and researcher were overlapping with my parent's perspective. I kept remembering those children in the Talented and Gifted project and how involved they had been in their projects. Hadn't they, in fact, been exploring some alternate literacies? I started to name the hope that had always been behind my teaching -- the hope that if we could identify children's at-home strengths and literacies, and if we then allowed students to use and expand those strengths, schools might do a better job of reaching more children and helping us all to become truly literate -- in many senses of the word.

My question had evolved. I now asked, What are the relationships between children's home and school literacies? My overlapping roles of teacher, parent, and researcher had led me to my question.
CHAPTER ONE

PERSPECTIVES ON LITERACY/LITERACIES:

COMING TO THE RESEARCH

In 1985, on a sunny October Saturday, I sat in Murkland Hall at the University of New Hampshire with a couple hundred other educators, listening as keynote speaker Lorri Neilsen described the literacy of the several adults she had been researching. (Neilsen, 1985) I was surprised and fascinated as Lorri told of her informant Elizabeth's reading of a co-worker's letter. As Elizabeth read the letter on her computer screen, she paused, and in an aside to Lorri, noted how the writer's tone had changed and predicted what the writer would say next. "He's about to ask for something," Elizabeth had told Lorri. "What was so important about that?" I silently wondered from my seat in the auditorium. As if in answer to my question, Neilsen went on to observe that Elizabeth was using her literacy to "read people." I leaned forward to listen more closely.

I'd never thought of literacy as a way of "reading people." Didn't literacy simply mean comprehending text, getting and giving information through the things you read and write? Wasn't literacy defined as reading and writing to communicate, to get things done, and, in the case of the novels I enjoyed so much, to have fun? Listening intently to Neilsen, I alternated between brushing off her ideas as obvious, and realizing just how profoundly they had affected me. Neilsen was giving me a
new way to look at literacy. She was looking beyond the obvious uses of print to uncover what it meant to her informants. She was defining literacy not simply as the ability to read and write but as the ability to use reading and writing to interpret work and relationships, as the use of print to make personal meaning. Neilsen spoke of literacy as a semiotic process -- a process of reading signs in one's daily world -- in oneself, and in others.

New as these ideas were to me, they made sense. As a teacher, I wanted my students to be literate. But I had not thought deeply about what that meant beyond comprehending and interpreting text. Neilsen gave me an inkling that literacy went beyond texts, an understanding that it was not so simple to navigate one's way through the print that surrounds people in our culture, even a suggestion that literacy might involve more than print.

As I left the auditorium that morning, I found myself thinking about how I'd define literacy. I wondered: if literacy is a process of meaning-making, what did that mean for my elementary students?

A few years later as a Ph.D. student, I was still wrestling with my definition of literacy. I kept thinking about the kinds of questions Neilsen asked of adults and wondering how they applied to children. I thought of students I'd had over the years, worrying about those I felt I had not reached. How could I have helped them become more literate? Did they, in fact, have literacies I had not noticed? My own children had many literacies that the school did not seem to know about, never mind call on. How could we educators do a better job of discovering the literacies children were
already exploring and developing in their lives and build on those to help them
become more fully literate adults?

These questions led me to this study. I asked,

**What are children's literacies at home, what are their literacies at school,**
**and in what ways do those literacies interact or differ?**

To approach these questions, it is first necessary to explore the concept of "literacy."
What is it? What does it mean? I will discuss the literature on literacy which has led
me to my personal definition. But before citing that definition, I will discuss research
in other areas which have impacted this study: family literacy, school literacy, home
and school relationships, and cognition. Then I will give my understanding of the
term "literacies" and will explain the research design and methodology of this project.

**What is Literacy?**

The term "Literacy" means different things to different people, and as Resnick
and Resnick point out, there has been a "sharp shift over time with expectations
concerning literacy." (Resnick and Resnick, 1988, 190) In some eras, a literate
person was one who could write his name, while in others the purpose of literacy was
to read and recall religious text; in many eras and cultures, literacy was the province

Literacy is not a single, fixed concept, and beliefs about literacy instruction
have changed as concepts of literacy have changed. In nineteenth century North
America, literacy instruction was based on a classical philosophy which emphasized
reason and logic, but according to prescribed patterns. Teaching methods were often
imitation, rote, and direct instruction. In the first part of the twentieth century, the
progressive movement opted for education for growth and self-expression; teaching methods called for experiential learning through discovery. More recent technocratic approaches have looked for effective performance and skills, with learning defined as mastery of specific objectives as measured by tests. (deCastell and Luke 1988, 161).

Others define literacy in a broader framework of meaning-making and see literacy development as a social and cultural process, rather than simply a process of skill development. Graff (1988, 83) urges us to look more at the long range effects of literacy than at test scores, for the effects of literacy depend on specific cultural contexts. Guthrie says that, more than skills, the question of "what it all means" is "the heart of literacy." (Guthrie 1979). The ways people use their literacy are closely related to their cultural norms. A literate Athabascan exhibits different behaviors than a literate white Canadian. Researchers on language development (Halliday, 1978; Harste, Woodward and Burke, 1984) have shown how language users actively make meaning as they interpret cultural signs and systems.

In recent American history, literacy and literacy instruction have been at the center of philosophical debates about the American educational system. America's literacy rate has been a concern. In 1985, Jonathan Kozol's book, Illiterate America, stated that the United States' literacy rate was forty-ninth out of the one hundred and twenty-eight countries in the United Nations (Kozol, 1985, cited in Freire and Macedo, 1987). Educational critics have called for at least "functional literacy," a term which "has come to mean the ability to read common texts such as newspapers and manuals and to use the information gained, usually to secure employment." (Resnick and Resnick, 1988, 200). "Back to Basics" advocates call for instructional
methods of a supposedly simpler time with direct instruction in skills seen as the answer to the need for greater literacy among our graduates. Others caution against oversimplification and misplaced nostalgia, for as limited as the objectives of functional literacy may be, the Resnicks point out, "this mass-literacy criterion is stronger than at any earlier period of history" (Resnick and Resnick, 1988, 200) and "there is no simple past to which we can return." (Resnick and Resnick 1988, 202)

Another theme in the ongoing debate about literacy standards in America is the question of cultural literacy. Hirsch (1987) and Bloom (1987) have called for specific attention to a literary canon which includes classic works in the western tradition -- works which supposedly reflect our culture and would inform our students of the great ideas of the past. Both theorists have been criticized for their exclusion of thinkers and works from a wide range of other cultures and ethnic groups, as well as their exclusion of feminist perspectives. Furthermore, Hirsch's list of people and ideas with which he claims students should be familiar, can be seen as a reductive attempt at mere familiarity with terminology rather than a thoughtful, reasoned way to analyze and relate ideas to each other. Chiseri-Strater has said, "Reductive arguments like those of Bloom and Hirsch encourage a very narrow view of what it means to know by focusing on highly particularized pieces of information, on restricted and exclusionary knowledge rather than on the wide range of literacies needed for living in our pluralized culture." (1991, xv) As I learned more about literacy, I realized it was that wide range of literacies that I wanted to explore.

At the other end of the spectrum from the Back to Basics advocates and those who call for functional literacy or cultural literacy, critical reformers like Paulo
Freire define literacy as personal empowerment to overcome oppression. Literacy, to Freire, is a political phenomenon, and the resistance or defiance of students who appear not to learn in our schools "corresponds to the oppressive elements in the curriculum that work against the students and their interests." (Freire and Macedo, 1987, 121). Freire calls for educators to "use their students' cultural universe as a point of departure." (Freire and Macedo, 1987, 127) This emphasis on students' personal cultures is in sharp contrast to the cultural materials which Hirsch would proscribe. Literacy to Freire involves not just reading print but recognizing and uncovering the social and political contexts in which meanings and relationships are embedded. As Freire says, literacy is "reading the word and the world." (Freire and Macedo, 1987; Freire, 1985) After reading such thinkers, I could no longer think of literacy as a self-defined, singular concept.

Sociolinguists like James Gee led me to think of discourses as influences on one's literacy. Gee, in exploring the question "What is Literacy?" (1989b) first defines "a discourse:"

a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or "social network" (18)

Gee says that our various discourses are culturally defined and may be acquired (unconsciously through exposure without a formal process of teaching) or learned (consciously, along with "some degree of meta-knowledge about the matter"). (1989b, 20). Primary discourses are acquired naturally within one's own group, while secondary discourses "are developed in association with and by having access to and practice with ... secondary institutions" such as "schools, workplaces, stores,
government offices, businesses, or churches." (1989b, 22) Gee then defines literacy as "control of secondary uses of language (i.e. uses of language in secondary discourses)." (1989b, 23) To help non-mainstream children access dominant literacies, Gee insists we need to provide opportunities for their acquisition, and that we should recognize that mainstream children "often look as if they are learning literacy (of various sorts) in school" when they, in fact, "are acquiring these literacies through experiences in the home both before and during school." (1989b, 24, emphasis in original) He urges that we help both mainstream and non-mainstream children toward awarenesses of various discourses, so that they can understand and critique them.

Like Gee, Rexford Brown has urged us to look beyond simple definitions of a single literacy which can easily be transmitted through instruction. He lists "the literacies that have been popularized in the last decade: cultural literacy, civic literacy, computer literacy, media literacy, scientific literacy, and technological literacy, to name a few." (1991, 141) He says that "all of these literacies ...require active -- not passive -- knowing. Moreover, all these literacies entail various capacities to think and solve problems...The new literacies, then, go far beyond basic decoding and encoding, even beyond basic factual knowledge, to encompass how different people know what they know, communicate, think, and attack problems...These literacies can be acquired only through a certain amount of active learning, hand- on experience, modeling, and apprenticeship." (1991, 142, emphasis in original)
If Gee and Brown are right (and I believe they are) that there is no single literacy, but rather a host of literacies which depend on the various discourses which people practice, it becomes important to recognize the literacies which children bring with them from their homes into their schools. Some researchers have studied children's literacies in their homes. What do we know about family literacy?

**What Do We Know about Family Literacy?**

Studies of emergent literacy have given us information about young children's literacy learning in their families. Jerome Bruner uses Vygotsky's term "scaffolding" to show how mothers act as conversational partners to their young children, reinforcing the sense-making nature of children's attempts at language and building on them. (Bruner, 1983). Gordon Wells' long-term study of children from ages three to ten concluded that children who experienced such early conversational interchanges were more successful in school. (Wells, 1986) Harste, Woodward, and Burke have suggested that "scaffolding" implies that the adult is in charge, instead of seeing both child and adult as "actively structuring the event." They suggest that such child/adult interactions are better called "tracking." (1984, 61)

Wells found that children who were read to (rather than simply being exposed to books which they could explore on their own) scored higher on measures of literacy throughout school. Many studies have indicated that being read to correlates positively with school success (Anderson et. al., 1984).

Some of the closest looks at family literacy are reports by parents about their own children (Bissex, 1980; Schickendanz, 1990). Glenda Bissex' account of her son Paul's literacy explorations from age 5 to 11 (1980) gave a thorough report of the
child's awareness of print, his growth in spelling and other skills, and the self-directed nature of his interest and involvement in literate activities at home. Later books and articles by parents about their own children have noted the influences of children's literature on children's writing and thinking (Tchudi, 1985; Voss, 1988; Atwell, 1989), the importance of supportive parental interactions and talk (Atwell, 1990; Tchudi, 1985; Laminack, 1990; Voss, 1991), and responsiveness to environmental print (Laminack, 1990). Cochran-Smith's study of a nursery school (1984), while not a home study, identified home influences as having a major impact on "the making of a reader."

The most comprehensive ethnographic studies of young children and their families' literacies were conducted by Taylor (1983) and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1989). In the first study, Taylor studied six middle class families whose young children were successfully learning to read. She noted that parents conserved some activities from their own childhoods (sometimes implicitly and sometimes as they juxtaposed their memories with current experiences), while consciously seeking to change others to provide different and richer experiences for their own children. She writes:

the interplay of the individual biographies and educative styles of the parents becomes the dominant factor in shaping the literate experiences of the children within the home. And yet, from the very beginning, the children are active and reactive in the sharing of literate experiences with their parents...Undoubtedly, each child brings a new dimension to the transmission of literacy style and values within the family. (1983, 23)

Taylor saw children using print "as one medium through which they can master their surroundings," including building social and environmental relationships. She
suggests that both adult literacy programs and schools introduce reading and writing in ways that "have some social significance in [children's] everyday lives." (1983, 89)

In *Growing Up Literate: Learning from Inner City Families*, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines found similar uses of print in the lives of inner-city families whose children were successfully learning to read and write, though the living experiences and social conditions faced by the families were fraught with enormous difficulties. Children drew picture of houses and family members, gave cards and messages, and were "active participants in building and maintaining their cultural worlds...However grim the realities of life may have appeared, the children were growing up with literacy as an integral part of their personal, familial, and social histories." (1988, 81)

In closely looking at the six inner-city families, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines found, "any preconceived or rigid conceptions of family life fade away. Each is an original, and each serves to emphasize the variety of patterns of cooperations and domestic organization in the institution that we call family." (1988, 193) They note, however, that schools know little of these individual lives.

We have no doubt that most of the teachers that we met cared for the children in their classrooms; yet few of the teachers knew much about the children's everyday lives...The impact upon teachers of the administrative requirements for children to do well on the tests left no time for them to learn about the lives of the children that they taught. (1988, 208)

Taylor's work has shown us aspects of the children's lives which schools do not always recognize. But her studies have focused strictly on print literacy. I wondered what other sense-making systems children use in their homes -- what signs hold
meaning for them in ways that schools may not see? What other literacies do they have?

Many other researchers have noted distance and disparity between the literacies of home and school. In her study of three communities in the Piedmonts, Shirley Brice Heath demonstrated how the attitudes and discourse patterns of children from Trackton and Roadville differed from the expectations and perceptions of their teachers and other Townspeople, thereby affecting their success in school. *Ways with Words*, the result of her nine-year study, gave extensive information about the ways home and school literacies operated in those communities. (Heath, 1983)

Research on various cultures and minority groups have shown how literacy patterns vary according to perspectives about time (Phillips, 1972, Lofty 1992), values regarding interpersonal interactions (Phillips, 1972, Scollon and Scollon, 1981), language structures and uses (Scribner and Cole, 1988), questioning patterns (Heath, 1983), attitudes toward testing (Deyhle, 1987), and differing cultural values and expectations (Shultz, Florio, and Erickson, 1982; Gibson, 1987; Delgado-Gaitan, 1987). Researchers in sociolinguistics have shown how different discourse patterns within our own culture lead to differential access to academic language and learning. Michaels' study of first-grade sharing time showed how this happens at an early age when mainstream teachers' expectations of appropriate talk and "topic-centered style" do not mesh with the "topic-associating" style of many black children, a style which is closer to a rich oral story-telling style (Michaels, 1981; 1985, Michaels and Collins, 1984; Gee, 1989a). Delpit (1988, 1991) cautions that non-explicit methods of teaching literacy may maintain differential power relationships between minorities
and the dominant white culture; minority children need opportunities to learn "power code literacy" as well as "personal literacy" in order to gain access to "the culture of power." (1991, 543)

In recent years, a number of family literacy projects have sprung up, many of which are intended to support immigrant and refugee families for whom English is a second language. Auerbach (1989) explains two different approaches to such family literacy projects. The goal of some is "to strengthen the ties between the home and the school by transmitting the culture of school literacy through the vehicle of the family." (169) Auerbach cautions against such a model, urging instead "a social-contextual model of family literacy that asks, How can we draw on parents' knowledge and experience to inform instruction? rather than, How can we transfer school practices into home contexts?" (177) The latter recognizes the family's strengths, supporting the home family and culture and operating as a participatory model, rather than working from deficit models which assume that school behaviors must be transferred to families.

Studies of minority groups are helpful in bringing educators to an awareness of the social and cultural dimensions of literacy. As institutions, homes and schools differ; home cultures depend not only on native languages and ethnic groups, but all the practices, values, and expectations that are embedded in them and in relationships among family members. Schools, institutions of the mainstream culture, promote particular varieties of literacy, which may not always mesh with the literacy (or literacies) of the home.
What Do We Know About School Literacy?

As noted in the earlier section on literacy, instruction in American schools often revolves around assessment of particular skills -- what Patrick Shannon refers to as "scientific management." (1988, 1990). Rather than instruction which grows from observations of children and their development, scientific management imposes specific measurable objectives which students are expected to reach. In this approach, direct instruction is the preferred mode of teaching, and children do many worksheets in order to practice specific skills. Rather than seeing literacy as something which pervades their lives and grows from their needs and interests, children read and write to fill in the blanks or to answer questions posed by teachers and texts. In basal reading groups, children are grouped according to ability, a practice which has been criticized for its harmful effects on the achievement and the self-concept of those placed in "low" groups (Allington, 1977, 1985), for its attempt to manage instruction (Shannon, 1988), and its hegemonic nature (Shannon 1988; Collins, 1989). In classrooms of this type, writing is often seen as separate from reading, to which it frequently takes a back seat. Donald Graves' 1977 Ford Foundation study of writing instruction found that "[more] than 90 percent of instruction in the classroom is governed by textbooks and workbooks. But only 10 to 15 percent of language-arts textbooks for children are devoted to writing. Most of the texts are dominated by exercises in grammar, punctuation, listening skills, and vocabulary development." (Graves, 1984, 67) Driven by tests and constrained by textbooks and basal readers, literacy education in America since World War II has
been primarily a matter of responding to prompts given in the book. (Apple, 1986; Shannon, 1989)

Educational critics (Goodlad, 1984; Sizer, 1985; Holt, 1982; Kozol, 1985) frequently criticize the nature of school activities in their disconnectedness from students' lives and interests. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, in Growing Up Literate (1988), show the drudgery of a typical school day for second-grader, Shauna. In another shocking but all-too-typical example, Gordon Wells (1986) recounts an interaction between teacher and Rosie, a young child from a poor household, as the teacher tries to get the child to talk or write about skiing -- an activity about which she has no knowledge. The bewildered child retreats into her usual stance (or defense) of silence.

Talk influences the literate environment and informs the literate activities in classrooms. In Classroom Discourse: The Language of Teaching and Learning, Courtney Cazden (1988) examines the use of talk in classrooms. Comparing classroom talk to the patterns used by parents as they play peekaboo or read to young children at home, Cazden observes:

[In that category of parent-child interactions] [T]here is a predictable structure, but the respective roles of parent and child change over time, with the child eventually speaking all the parts.

The contrast between such learning environments and the classroom is striking. In school lessons, teachers give directions and the children nonverbally carry them out; teachers ask questions and children answer them, frequently with only a word or a phrase. Most important, with the exception of reciprocal teaching, these roles are not reversible. Children never give directions to teachers, and rarely even ask them questions except to request permission. (1988, 134)

Cazden advocates more peer talk in schools, as one way to provide for reversal and interchangable roles between student and teacher.
Other sociolinguists have studied the structure of classroom events and the ways that structure influences student participation. Mehan concludes, "Although it is incumbent on students to display what they know, they also must know how to display their knowledge." (1982, 79). Shultz, Florio, and Erickson discuss the different interactional demands of home and school and urge that "educators think in terms of differing 'kinds of competence,' which change systematically from situation to situation, rather than thinking of 'incompetence' or 'deficiency.'" (1982, 118)

In recent years, while scientific management approaches continue to dominate much of American education, other philosophies have made headway and have brought about some significant changes in approaches to literacy teaching. The writing process movement has advocated student decision-making and responsibility for choosing topics and books, revising and responding, and for self-evaluation. (Graves, 1983; Calkins, 1983; Calkins, 1986; Hansen, 1987; Atwell, 1987). It has also advocated conferences, which encourage the two-way kinds of communication which Cazden recommended -- both between teacher and student and among peers. As teachers confer with student writers (and readers), students control much of the talk of the conference so that the teacher (or peer) learns about the student's topic, process, and attitudes toward reading and writing. The "whole language" movement (Goodman, 1986) has appealed to large numbers of elementary teachers, particularly in the primary grades, who want their curricula to reflect real language using children's literature and writing rather than packaged materials and basals.

Literacy in classrooms which subscribe to the "process" approach or "whole language" teaching provide different contexts for literacy than the traditional
teacher-centered classrooms of the middle twentieth century; they are more akin to
the progressive schools led by Dewey and Parker at the turn of the century (Shannon,
1990), and they aim to provide literate opportunities which are meaningful in
children's daily lives. Dewey commented on the disparity between homes and
schools:

Call up in imagination the ordinary schoolroom, its time-schedules, schemes
of classification, of examination and promotion, of rules of order, and I think
you will grasp what is meant by 'pattern of organization.' If then you contrast
this scene with what goes on in the family, for example, you will appreciate
what is meant by the school being a kind of institution sharply marked off
from any other form of social organization. (1938, 18)

Dewey set forth his "new philosophy," as one founded on "the idea that there is an
intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and
education," and he said, "The problem for progressive education is: What is the place
and meaning of subject-matter and of organization within experience?" (1938, 18)
Dewey said that "education is essentially a social process," (1938, 58); a classroom
becomes a community.

In recent years, the teacher-researcher movement has given us accounts from
many educators who have understood their classrooms as communities or cultures in
their own right (Five, 1992; Stires, 1991; Cairney and Langbien, 1989). Avery traced
one first-grader's growing self-confidence as she learned to read and write (1985) and
another child's growth in critical literacy as he learned to understand some of the
opinions and values behind statements people make (1987). These educators sit
alongside children in classrooms in an attempt to understand children's learning in
context, rather than in disembedded laboratory experiments or interviews. These are
the kinds of classrooms which appear to offer more "spaces" or "fields of possibilities" (to use Maxine Greene's terms, 1988) in which various approaches to literacy -- and various literacies -- may flourish. They are the kinds of classrooms I wanted to know more about in my attempt to understand the ways children's home literacies mesh (or fail to mesh) with the literacies of school.

**What Do We Know About Home and School Relationships?**

In the 1970's, Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot studied relationships of schools and families, with a focus on parents and teachers of elementary school children. She noted the irony "that families and schools are engaged in a complementary sociocultural task and yet they find themselves in conflict with one another." (1978, 20) She comments:

"Some of the discontinuities between family and school emerge from differences in their structural properties and cultural purposes...In families, the interactions are functionally diffuse in the sense that the participants are intimately and deeply connected and their rights and duties are all-encompassing and taken for granted. In schools, the interactions are functionally specific because the relationships are more circumscribed and defined by the technical competence and individual status of the participants." (21)

Parents' expectations for their children are particularistic while teachers' expectations are universalistic; that is, teachers are concerned with values in general, whereas parents' wishes for fair treatment of their children includes an expectation of particularized attention. (23) Lightfoot noted that teachers drew territorial boundaries which parents were not expected to cross, but that some creative conflict between parents and teachers was inevitable and positive in societal terms; "[d]iscontinuities between families and schools become disfunctional when they reflect differences in power and status in this society." (41) Lightfoot was looking at
the relationships between parents and teachers, more than interactions and discontinuities of home and school literacies. However, the sometimes contradictory nature of home and school structures and purposes may apply whenever we consider the cultures of the two institutions.

Researchers have studied parental attitudes and involvement toward schools. Studies indicate the importance of parents' involvement in their children's educations (Greany, 1980), but as Rasinski points out (1989), parents are most often told what to do by schools rather than empowered. Lotz and Suhorsky (1989) and Zuga (1983) investigated teachers' and parents' attitudes, but they limited their focus to parent-teacher conferences and used surveys rather than ethnographic means. Zuga (1983) noted that information traditionally flows from teacher to parent to child and that parents' comments have little influence on curriculum. Link (1980) interviewed five sets of parents who identified different roles for themselves and for schools with regard to reading development. Holland (1987) reported on an Appalachian study in which active teachers who reached out to parents developed three-way collaborations between parents, teachers, and children; passive teachers had less success communicating with parents.

A recent study by sociologist Annette Lareau examined the school involvement of parents from different social classes. While parents from working class families were interested in their child's progress in school, those parents were less likely to intervene in their child's schooling than more educated upper middle class parents were. They were less aware of possible ways to impact their child's
schooling (by requesting certain teachers, for example) than the more affluent parents. Lareau writes:

The experience of Colton [the working class school] parents suggests that the lack of a college education is an exercise in exclusion: exclusion from understanding conversations at school; exclusion from feeling that one belongs at school and is capable of evaluating the performance of better-educated persons; even exclusion from being able to help children with their school work. By virtue of social class differences in networks, working-class parents typically have no access to the sorts of detailed rumors about the talents and failings of local teachers that were so readily available to Prescott parents. (Lareau 1989, 119)

Upper middle class parents did not have equal relationships with teachers, either.

Teachers sought parental involvement, but, as Lareau explains:

Rather than a partnership, a more accurate term for what teachers wanted is a "professional-client" relationship, where -- at least in first and second grade -- both parents and children are seen as clients. In this relationship, teachers view education as a round-the-clock experience in which parents can, and should, play a role in supplementing the classroom experience by preparing children for school, reinforcing the curriculum, and showing support (often symbolic) by attending school events. Teachers saw an interdependency between home and school, not a separation.

Schools, in short, (or at least the schools studied by Lareau) look for support from the home rather than ways the school may support or extend the culture and strengths of the home.

A number of ethnographers have looked at literacy relationships between homes and schools in particular communities: the Amish (Fishman, 1988), Athabascans (Scollan and Scollan, 1981), and three communities (a black community of rural origin, a lower class white mill community, and white middle class) in the Carolina Piedmonts (Heath, 1983). Catherine Snow and her colleagues undertook a comprehensive study of the literacy of students from low-income families in a New
England city (1991), using a combination of quantitative and ethnographic approaches. Researchers designed three models to reflect different theories to account for the ways parents contribute to literacy development: family as educator, the resilient family, and parent-school partnership. They predicted the relationships which would exist between numerous home factors (such as rating of mother's literacy, hours of t.v viewing, school punctuality, and many others) with four literacy factors (word recognition, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and word production (as measured on tests) and a writing sample (based on the same assigned topic). They tested the models using information from student tests, along with ethnographic interviews and observations in schools and classrooms. They analyzed correlations between home factors and literacy development and also between school practices and literacy development.

Among their many findings and recommendations, two statements are particularly interesting in the light they shed on home and school literacy connections. Snow et. al state:

One of our most robust findings was the improved performance of children whose teachers were in contact with their parents, facilitating transmittal of information in both directions. The teacher can explain grades and initiate discussion of a child's academic strengths and weaknesses; parents have the opportunity to reveal their true level of interest and concern about their children's achievement. (170, emphasis added)

Another interesting finding was that "ten or twenty minutes a day alone with an adult is more than most children have access to, but ... even so little time can make a difference in children's vocabularies and in their reading comprehension skills." (171) They recommend "practices which encourage direct parental help, such as asking
children to read aloud regularly to a parent" (173) and much more outreach to encourage parental involvement in the school, as well as in literacy activities at home. (174)

Though these research projects differ in their emphasis and come from both quantitative and ethnographic traditions, all agree that additional connections between homes and schools would benefit children.

**How Do Studies in Cognition Relate to Literacy Development?**

Lauren Resnick summarizes current cognitive theory in the introduction to *Knowing, Learning, and Instruction: Essays in Honor of Robert Glaser*. She writes:

Current cognitive theory emphasizes three interrelated aspects of learning that, together, call for forms of instructional theory very different from those that grew out of earlier associationist and behaviorist psychologies. First, learning is a process of knowledge *construction*, not of knowledge recording or absorption. Second, learning is *knowledge-dependent*; people use current knowledge to construct new knowledge. Third, learning is highly tuned to the *situation* in which it takes place. (1989,1)

Researchers like Resnick who hail from a more experimental tradition and researchers who favor qualitative research approaches agree on those key foundational learning principles. Numerous researchers in the field of literacy development have shown how such learning principles are played out as young children learn to speak, write, and read (Bissex, 1980; Hall, 1987; Harste, Woodward, and Burke, 1984; Smith, 1988; Schieffelin and Gilmore, 1986; Wells, 1986) and as students of all ages learn from and with each other (Brown and Palincsar, 1989; Cook-Gumperz, 1986). Researchers and practitioners associated with what is called "writing and reading process" (Graves, 1983; Calkins, 1986; Atwell, 1987; Hansen, 1987; Karelitz, 1988) acknowledge the principles that literacy
is a process of meaning-making (knowledge construction), that learning depends on the background knowledge and experiences the learner brings (knowledge-dependent), and that learning takes place within a particular social and cultural context (situational).

Current cognitive theory has been greatly influenced by the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. (1978, 1986) Vygotsky believed that learning is first social and then is internalized.

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)... All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals. (1978, 57, emphasis in original)

Bruner, too, has taught us the importance of social contexts for learning. "Language is acquired not in the role of spectator, but through use," he says, (1990, 70) and he sees narrative as "an instrument for making meaning that dominates much of life in culture..." (1990, 97) Language and literacy development are social and cultural processes, not merely learning the rules of language and the skills of reading and writing.

Other cognitive psychologists have acknowledged the meaning-making nature of learning and its situatedness. Lave and Wenger (1991) have developed a theory of cognition, Limited Peripheral Participation, which is based on studies of apprenticeship. In her study of two hundred creative individuals, John-Steiner recognized the importance of outside influences such as mentors; she also noted that individuals' own internal mechanisms of thought ("mental tools") were influenced by one's background and interests.
Cognitive psychologist Howard Gardner recognizes the importance of cultural factors on intellectual development. Gardner has developed a theory of multiple intelligences, and he has identified seven intelligences: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Intelligences include skills of problem-solving and problem-finding within a particular domain. Gardner uses eight "signs" to identify intelligences, among them "relative autonomy from other human faculties" in that they can be affected by damage to particular areas of the brain (59) and "susceptibility to encoding in a symbol system." (66) He states:

Like other aspects of cognition, the multiple intelligences really come into their own and become enwrapped with cultural artifacts during the years immediately before school. Not surprisingly, the culture also determines the importance placed on the various intellectual competencies." (1991, 81-82)

Gardner's important work on multiple intelligences challenges teachers to be aware of varied forms of intelligence and to avoid what Siegel (1984, quoted in Siegel and Carey, 1989) and Fueyo (1988) call "verbocentricism." (1990) Gardner has said:

[Individuals succeed in the world to the extent that they can develop and exploit their potentials. For those with strength in the logical and linguistic domains, school often provides appropriate and rich educational experiences; but schools have an equal duty to help those students with other kinds of strengths to recognize and develop them. (Femic 1992, 222)

Others have studied non-print literacies of children. Some have studied the meanings of young children's art work (Gardner, 1980; Hubbard, 1989; Matthews, 1992). Fueyo (1990) investigated first-graders' literacies in play, the creative arts, and the language arts. She noted the verbocentrism of our schools (and our society in general) but urged us to allow children to make meaning in other symbol systems.
besides words. Dyson (1989) has done extensive work with first graders, and she notes the ways they use varied media.

Reading Fueyo’s and Dyson’s work and the work of others who study young children, I wondered if older children would benefit from on-going opportunities to paint and sing and act and play like first-graders. As children enter further into the world of print, must we limit other literacies as much as we do? Do some children have literacies which we inhibit or never see? If so, what does that mean for the education we are providing those children?

Such questions led me back to the field which Neilsen had introduced to me: semiotics. Semioticians believe that sense-making is a process of reading and interpreting signs, and that such interpretations take place not only cognitively (within the mind) and not simply imitatively (based on the models of others in the culture) but transactively. (Harste, Burke, and Woodward, 1984). In other words, the learner brings his or her own personal and cultural understandings to an object of a culture. That object (a printed word, for example) is seen as a sign which signifies some meaning — not a single meaning common only to the learner, but some shared social meaning. Buchler, explaining the theories of Charles Peirce, puts it this way:

Peirce maintains that in so far as thought is cognitive it must be linguistic or symbolical in character — that is, it must presuppose communication. Communication takes place by means of signs, and Peirce's theory, in its investigation of the nature and conditions of the sign-relation, endows with a new and vital significance the old truth that man is a social animal. His view differs from others in stressing that pragmatic definition cannot be in terms of individual reaction or private sensation, which are incommunicable, but of that which is public and general -- a habit of action. If our language is to possess cognitive meaning, it must be defined by the ways in which it is used communicatively. In opposition to atomistic psychology, Peirce demonstrates that no thought (in so far as it is a mental sign) is perfectly unitary or simple but is inseparable from interpretation by further thoughts. Thought is
inferential, expectative, or predictive, and therefore always in some degree general. It is not a granular succession, but a web of continuously related signs.

Meanings depend on social context and on individuals' interpretations of the signs within that context.

Using language is a semiotic process (Halliday, 1978). But meaning-making is not limited to language. Our culture privileges language as a communicative system, but art and dance, for example, are sense-making systems, too, and are more highly valued as such in some other cultures. Critical thinking is possible without language. (Siegel and Carey, 1989) I kept wondering: what are some of the ways children read and respond to the signs -- print and non-print -- which surround them? I found myself thinking of such sense-making systems as literacies, and I needed to know more about them.

**Why Speak of "Literacies"?**

When I speak of literacies, I borrow from Gardner's concept of intelligences, just as I borrow from Gee's concept of discourses. I use the word "literacies" to mean those understandings which allow an individual to make meaning in a symbol system -- spoken or written words, art or music or wood or media. In most cases, *but not all*, the print literacies of reading and writing play some part. Because "Literacy" traditionally refers to reading and writing and because literacy teaching has been my personal background and interest, I begin by looking at children's print literacies. However, I mean the term "literacies" to mean personal competencies and literacies which may be expressed *not only in words* but in performance, always recognizing them as aspects of an individual's particular culture(s) as well as his or her specialized
talents. "Literacies" (like "literacy" or like "intelligence") is a useful term or construct, but it is hard to define precisely. No literacy exists in and of itself. No literacy can be totally extracted and separated from other literacies or from the complex web of cultural practices which surround and accompany it. As I learned more about children's varied literacies, I would come to see them as meaning-making systems which could be used in varied ways: functionally, communicatively, reflectively, flexibly, and pleasurably.

**Coming to the Research: Design, Access, and Attitudes**

To discover the range of children's literacies, I knew I would have to see the children both inside and outside of school. How do they use reading and writing at school and in their daily lives? What other talents, interests, and literacies do they have? To what extent do those outside interests and literacies connect with the literacies called on by the school?

**Making a Case for Case Studies**

To uncover answers to these questions, I decided to study three children in depth and to write descriptive case studies of them. As a former classroom teacher, I was drawn to case studies because they provided a way to create close portraits and analyses of individual learners -- the kind of information I wished I could have had about every one of my students. Case studies offered a chance to explore the complex interweaving of factors which affect a child's learning, including the environments -- the contexts-- in which children learn and relate to others. Those contexts seemed particularly important to acknowledge in a study about home and school influences.
Ethnographic research is sometimes denigrated and not taken seriously due to its interest in people's stories. Somehow stories, to some, do not seem serious or scientific. But Bruner asserts that "one of the most ubiquitous and powerful discourses in human communication is narrative." (Bruner, 1990, 77) Stories, in fact, can be not only serious but powerful. Brodkey has claimed that "[a]ll ethnographies begin in stories...the value of ethnography inheres in neither analysis nor interpretation, but in the researcher's decision to examine lived cultural experience -- to conceptualize it, reflect on it, narrate it, and evaluate it." (1987, 32) Brodkey distinguished experimental or interpretive ethnography from traditional or analytic ethnography, showing that the former does not pretend to be objective; it constructs rather than discovers reality (1987, 29) and narration is part of its method. Newkirk (1991) suggests that cases studies acquire much of their power not only from their particularity, but also from the ways they reflect cultural myths and beliefs, such as stories of transformation. He cautions, however, that by relying on a case study's rhetorical power without reconciling it to its "phenomenological imperative," a case study sometimes loses believability. As I gathered data, and more so as I shaped data into a narrative, I tried to balance those two imperatives. I looked for the drama which is present in each child's story (dramas which may reflect some of our cultural stories and therefore the story's rhetorical power), yet I tried to be realistic and honest and to let the rough edges -- the places where patterns were imperfect -- show (to maintain particularity and believability).

Why, then, are case studies valuable? For me, they are valuable simply because they are so human -- both as portraits of individuals and as interpretations of
the researcher. People respond to people and to each other's stories; teachers and parents can learn more about children — and about themselves — by reading stories of individuals. They can learn new questions to ask, new subtleties to notice.

Psychiatrist and writer Robert Coles urges medical students to listen to people's stories. He quotes another doctor and writer, William Carlos Williams: "Their story, yours, mine -- it's what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them." (1989, 30) Researchers and educators have the same responsibility.

From School to Home

I wanted to begin in the school and study children from the same classroom, both because it made the study more manageable and because I could then get a sense of the range of responses children make to the literacies of school. From there, I would move out into the homes.

I wanted to work in a "process" or "whole language" class. The label itself was not the important thing; the teaching philosophy was. A class based on recent learning theory (that learners construct knowledge, use what they already know to learn more, and learn from and with each other), might make a better match for a range of literacies than a more traditional model. I wondered, what kinds of home and school literacies work together in such a classroom, and which literacies, if any, are still not included there?

I hoped to study fourth-graders, because fourth grade is often viewed as different from the primary grades. Teacher Beth Worth calls it "a crisis point. If we don't reach them here, they fall further and further behind and we lose them." In
fourth grade, the emphasis sometimes shifts from personal exploration and
child-centeredness toward content and the need to "cover" certain material before
children go on in a few years to middle school or junior high. Parents tend to be less
involved in their children’s schooling in the middle grades than they were when the
children were in primary grades. Further, we have less information about this age-
group than about younger children; recent years have seen a plethora of studies on
emergent literacy and less about middle grade children.

The Dilemmas of Participant-observation

To gather data for the case studies, I used ethnographic methods --
participant-observation at school and in homes, along with interviews of children,
their parents, and their teacher. Usually the interviews were informal ones conducted
in the course of other activities, but a few were more formal.

In anthropology, ethnography allows researchers both closeness to the culture
under study -- an attempt to "go native" -- along with the scientific distance a
researcher needs to analyze and interpret the data. It calls for collection of extensive
information to create a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of the culture under study.
It is always a tenuous situation to retain the right mix of participation and
observation, to become immersed enough in the culture to understand the natives’
point of view yet to retain enough distance from it to see patterns which natives may
not recognize or acknowledge. In Culture and Truth, Rosaldo (1989) tells a story
which illustrates the dilemma of how much to identify with informants, how much to
"go native." Dorinne Konda, a Japanese American researcher, one day saw reflected
in the metal above the butcher counter a tired, ordinary Japanese housewife, and she
was shocked to realize it was her! Fearing she had lost the distance she needed, she took a break from the field and returned to the states for awhile. Yet, even when she returned with her sense of herself and her role more firmly in hand, she had advantages and disadvantages due to her Japanese ancestry. She was accepted more quickly into certain social groups, yet was unable to ask certain direct or "indelicate" questions and to cross certain status lines.

As a former teacher observing in a school and as a fellow citizen studying families in my own community, I faced some of the dilemmas that Dorinne Kondo, the Japanese-American anthropologist, faced. How could I keep the right balance of immersion in the culture and distance from it? I was already a member of the culture I was studying (though not the particular classroom culture or the individual family cultures), which gave me some of the access of an insider, but which also made it hard to recognize some of my own assumptions. I knew this would be particularly true when I went into a classroom. Because I had spent so many years as a teacher, it would be uncomfortable for me to situate myself in a school or classroom where the philosophy of teaching differed greatly from mine. I did not want to feel that I was in an adversarial relationship with the teacher. That awareness led me to choose a school with a "process" or "whole language" orientation and to work with a teacher with whom I felt comfortable. It was important to work with a reflective teacher who viewed my presence as an opportunity for us to learn together.

With families, the dilemma was slightly different. I had spent so much time in a variety of classrooms that I could be comfortable and unobtrusive in the right kind, but it would be a challenge to be a participant-observer in families other than
my own. In a way, the families seemed like individual cultures, each of them
different from my own. I hoped to establish relationships of trust with both children
and parents. By first building relationships with children in school, I hoped it would
make my transition to home visits less problematic. I tried to build relationships with
the families based on our similarities and our mutual interest in their children. I
presented myself to the parents both as an educator interested in learning more about
children, and as a parent like themselves. As a resident in the community, I shared
that background, as well, so sometimes I talked to adults about issues of local interest
as a way to establish some common ground.

I told the families I hoped my research would not only help me and other
teachers, but would give them more information about their child's learning. Two of
the families participated in the study primarily because they felt it would benefit their
children; the third offered out of more general interest in educational issues. All
three appeared comfortable with my visits to their homes, which became more
informal as time went on. However, due to the nature of my relationship as an
outsider to each family, I remained more an observer than a participant in individual
families.

Gaining Access to the School

I wanted a school with a mixed population, so I chose to do my research in a
small New England city with a high percentage of blue collar families and a
substantial minority population. (See Chapter 2). I began by contacting the principal
at a school known in the area for its "process" or "whole language" approach. My
older son had attended the school ten years previously, but I had had little formal
contact with the school in the intervening decade. I did know some of the faculty casually, having met them at conferences or when they attended workshops I had given at another local school. I had a close professional relationship with one member of the faculty; (we teach a course together). The principal was enthusiastic about my research. With his agreement, I conducted a pilot study at the school in the spring of 1991, and then made plans for the current research project.

The teacher who participated in the pilot study decided not to participate in the larger study. She claimed it was not a negative reaction to the project—on the contrary, she said she found my paper accurate and enlightening—but she felt self-conscious reading about herself and wanted a year to "just close my door and teach." The principal suggested three other teachers who might like to participate, and I visited each of them in their classes several times in early September. I was uneasy about working with one who had been my son's teacher; he had been such a positive influence on my son that I felt my appreciation would color my feelings and make it hard for me to observe with enough distance. Also, he had a tiny room, in which it would have been hard for me to move around easily and to sit next to some of the children. The second teacher was willing and cooperative, but she taught fifth grade. From my first interaction with Beth Worth1, I knew I would like to work with her, for not only did she teach fourth grade, but her directness and reflectiveness impressed me. By the third week of September, Beth had agreed that I could remain in her room as participant-observer. I spent two (occasionally three or four) full days a week in her classroom from September through January, and one day a week from

1 The names of the teacher and all students have been changed to protect the students' privacy.
February through March. In the spring, I continued to stop by often, but on a more sporadic basis.

**Participant-observer in the Classroom**

In the classroom, I acted as a participant-observer. Sometimes I sat on the periphery of the class, watching and listening and taking notes (I became famous for my clipboard), especially early in the year. I frequently sat down beside children and observed them at work, often asking them questions or helping them with their work. A couple of times, I read the class a story or led a mini-lesson, and once near the end of the year, I acted as substitute teacher for most of the day when Beth went home sick. Except for that occasion (which occurred after data-collection was mostly complete), I did not take on the authority of teacher, but tried to maintain a separate role. When children asked permission to leave the room or to use particular supplies, for example, I always referred them to Beth or the student teacher.

Early in the study, Beth and I met with the children to explain that I was studying children's learning at home and at school. I demonstrated my tape recorder and read them excerpts from my fieldnotes. Whenever children asked me what I was writing, I let them see it or read it to them. In the spring, I read them some finished pieces — a short article about one of my case studies and an article about a whole-class sharing time. [In both cases, I first obtained permission of the children involved.] A couple of times during the year, I wrote poems for a class occasion and read them to everyone.
Gaining Access to the Homes

In September, I wrote a general letter of explanation to all the families in the class and obtained permission from all but one family to refer to the children (with pseudonyms) as needed in my study. Later in the fall, I contacted individual families to become my case studies. In one case, I sent a note home with the child saying I would call. In the phone call, I explained my project and asked to talk further. We scheduled a meeting and talked in more detail about what I was interested in, the time it would take, and so on. I gave the family a letter which explained the project and asked parent and child to sign if they agreed to take part. I approached the other two families at Open House in mid-October, then followed up with meetings in their homes and with the letters. All the families contacted agreed to participate, and everyone gave written permission except for one of the children who said, "My mother can sign. I write enough in school." I checked with him several times and received his verbal agreement to participate. (I was concerned from time to time when he seemed unwilling to talk to me, and I did not push him at those times. At other times, he came to me. I wondered what he would think of the final piece about himself, and I was pleased when he was quite delighted, though shy about allowing anyone else in the class to see it.) In addition to the three case studies, I contacted a couple of other families by phone and visited them in their homes.

Participant-observer in the Homes

When I visited the homes, I tried to be as much a participant-observer as possible, rather than merely an interviewer. Recognizing that a researcher's presence always affects the situation to some degree, I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible.
My aim was to make my visits feel like a neighbor stopping by to chat in the midst of usual family activity. Though I know my presence affected interactions somewhat, I felt I did successfully establish rapport with family members in all cases. These relationships will be discussed more fully in the case studies in chapters four, five, and six.

The three children who became my case studies were Eric Eldredge, Kelly McCormack, and Janette Dumont. In one home (the Eldredges), I often visited after school; the mother (Denise) and I talked while the children played outside. Sometimes I interacted with Eric when he came in, and sometimes I stopped by briefly outside to see him at play. I also visited the family in the evening, and once I accompanied Denise, Eric, and his sister, Nicole, to an event at Nicole's school.

Kelly McCormack's mother, Carol, spent long mornings talking with me in her living room while the children were at school. I also visited there after school while Kelly and her sisters and friends played together (or played with me), I watched television with them in the evening, and I accompanied Kelly and her older sister on their morning paper route. I also went to one of Kelly's basketball games.

Janette Dumont is my neighbor, and I had wondered whether or not to approach her parents about the possibility of her becoming a case study. At school Open House early in October, Janette's mother told me my project sounded interesting and they'd be willing to help if I needed them. That interchange encouraged me to choose Janette as my third informant, with her agreement. My relationship with her and her family was somewhat different than the others. I sometimes saw Janette at play in her backyard, and I chatted informally with her.
parents as we raked leaves or met on the sidewalk. On some occasions, I sat with
Janette's mother or both parents at their kitchen table, informally interviewing while
Janette and her brother played nearby. A couple of times during the course of the
research, Janette and a friend came to my house to bake. Another day, I went with
her to a Campfire meeting at the home of one of her classmates.

On some of the visits to homes, I turned on the tape recorder, but on others, I
relied on fragmentary notes which I later fleshed out. I tried to take my cues from
the situation, according to what seemed most comfortable at the time. Similarly, at
school, I sometimes taped and sometimes relied exclusively on field notes.

In both of the two-parent families (Eldredge and Dumont) as well as the
single-parent family (McCormack), I spoke most frequently to the mothers -- partly
because I was more comfortable talking to them as I might talk to a neighbor about
our kids and events in the neighborhood. Also, it was easier to schedule time with
the mothers, as all were home during some part of the day.

I already knew the Dumonts, who offered to help me in my work. Although
that made initial access easier, I felt some anxiety that the research project not
interfere with our already established relationship, so I was cautious about
approaching them too often. With them, as with the other families, I emphasized that
they should speak to me about any misgivings, needs to reschedule, and so on; every
family did call me at least once during the study to rearrange a planned visit. But my
anxieties concerned more than time: while I recognized that I must evaluate
behaviors in order to interpret the data, I did not want to judge my informants. This
desire to be fair and nonjudgemental to everyone conflicted with my aim to truthfully
report what I saw, acknowledging informants' weaknesses as well as strengths. I constantly struggled to resolve this conflict. Peshkin (1988) has written of his various subjectivities and the ways he tries to identify them to lessen their influence on the research. While recognizing that my attitudes must necessarily affect my perceptions somewhat, I, too, tried to stay in touch with my subjectivities. By identifying my feelings, I strove to honestly identify my impressions and interpretations — even when they were negative.

As with the teacher, I wanted people who would tell me directly what they were thinking; I knew I was already anxious enough about intruding on them and didn't want to have to second-guess their feelings. So I made it clear that they should tell me if they were uneasy or unwilling to share particular information. There were a few times when this limited my access to data. Eric did not want me to see certain pages of his Baby Book, and he felt uneasy about me watching while he and his father worked in their workshop. I did not insist on either occasion. Once, Janette had agreed that I could come to her house in the afternoon to interview her, but when her mother confessed to me that Janette had told her my attentions were "getting a little aggravating," I decided to forego the formal interview that day. I later invited Janette and her friend to make sundaes at my house, and we chatted informally about many of the questions I still had. I tried hard to be respectful of the families, their feelings, and their time. At various times, each family indicated they felt that to be true and appreciated it.
My Relationship with the Teacher

I had only a few formal interviews with teacher Beth Worth, but we chatted informally every day. At first, I was unsure how much to comment on classroom events. Beth encouraged me to make suggestions about classroom practice, for she knew of my background in the field of literacy and was eager for information or observations I might have. But I wanted to see how she did things, and I struggled to maintain the right balance of investigator and confidante (Lightfoot, 1978). One day, very early on, I read aloud some notes I had taken as I watched one of the children write, and Beth liked that. As a teacher she didn't have the time to closely observe for an extended time as I did, and she said my notes helped her see that student. I was comfortable sharing those kinds of observations and continued to do so. I offered Beth my field notes to read, but she preferred to talk instead.

Beth had a student teacher in the fall, along with a second student who participated two mornings a week for several weeks, and another student teacher in the spring. Often Beth and I -- sometimes the student teacher, too -- spent Beth's planning time (while the children were at art or music or gym) talking informally about what had occurred in class that day. Just as I sometimes shared observations I'd made, Beth often told me things she thought I'd be interested in. She shared her insights, and when she asked me what I thought about things, I told her. I also told Beth about many of my visits and observations in the homes, just as I shared with parents some of their children's schoolwork or stories of classroom events.

When Beth handled situations differently than I would have, I refrained from offering advice. Instead, I asked her about those things. For example, Beth wanted
Paul to eliminate blood and gore and bring his stories to tidy conclusions. I wondered if writing violence allowed him a safe way to work out some of his feelings — if, in fact, he needed that space and freedom. I didn't tell Beth how to handle it — I wasn't sure, either — but by airing our views, we each had more to consider.

Beth was not a full collaborator -- I had designed the project and would do the interpretation and the writing -- but she collaborated in many ways. She constantly reflected on my observations, offering her interpretations of a child's behavior or explaining the purposes behind a particular activity or classroom event. I asked her about her practice. She asked me what I saw. We both commented on what it might mean.

I will give a fuller description of Beth Worth and her classroom, in Chapters two and three.

**Organizing and Analyzing the Data**

Most of my data came from field notes and audiotape recordings. In both home and school settings, I collected samples of children's writing and reading, though it was much more difficult to do so from the homes. Each family showed me records and papers from earlier years in their child's life, and some showed me family photographs. I took some photographs in the homes and at school. I kept a research journal in which I noted my reactions in the field -- feelings, problems, questions, plans, tentative hypotheses and interpretations.

To organize the data, I catalogued it in a detailed table of contents as I filed my field notes and journal entries in loose-leaf notebooks. Later, I color-coded the
data according to particular informants (the three case study children and their families, the teacher, and additional children). As I wrote each case study, I further coded the data on that child. For one case study, I listed events, quotations, and other information, which I then color-coded according to categories, such as "relationship with father," "reading for pleasure," "busy hands." I cut the lists apart, so that each notation was on a separate slip of paper; then I could overlap and rearrange categories as necessary. For the other two case studies and for the chapter about the classroom and teacher (Chapter 2), I used colored notecards for each piece of information. Then I could arrange notecards instead of strips of paper as I analyzed the data.

As I considered the information on each of the case studies, I looked for patterns which could be supported by multiple data sources. I looked for support from my direct observations, commentary by teacher, peers, or family members -- in interviews or in conversation, products made by the children, and the children's own statements. For example, I came to an understanding of Kelly's interactive literacy from observation (her interactions with me, her reliance on her sister), her writing and reading (a note to a friend, her Portugal report) and comments by her mother and teacher.

Though I looked to the data for my conclusions and made interpretations cautiously, I realized I brought my personal perspectives to the work as I decided what to observe and record, selected particular data to include, and wrote the narratives. As I worked, I constantly tried to confront and acknowledge the influence of my personal background and beliefs. It helped to discuss ideas with Beth and with
other colleagues. Later, each family (and the teacher) read the parts of the manuscript that affected them. I specifically asked them to tell me if they thought anything was inaccurate, unfair, or hurtful. All three families reacted positively to the chapters about them and suggested only minor changes.

Throughout the study, as I learned about the children's home literacies, I wondered, what does this tell us about the ways these particular children learn? What does this mean for their schooling? How can we design classroom environments which include ways for children to express themselves in their varied literacies? How can we use the literacies individuals already have to help them learn the literacies of reading and writing?

The study does not answer all of these questions. But in its portrayal of three fourth-graders, the study shows the rich and varied home literacies that children bring to school and the very different ways those home literacies relate to the literacies of school. I hope the study will add to the dialogue about the connections and disconnections of children's home and school literacies -- and will help us appreciate the wealth and explore the possibilities of children's varied literacies.
I was surprised when I first drove through Newbridge many years ago. Knowing it to be one of New England's early settlements, I'd imagined Newbridge to be a sleepy, romantic village of white clapboard churches, rustic fish markets, and stately colonial homes with expansive, landscaped grounds, all arranged around a charming harbor. I found instead a small city filled with all the variety any city offers — courthouses and offices, hospital and college, restaurants and fast food shops and convenience stores of all descriptions, plus plenty of traffic along the route which connects Newbridge and its seaside neighbors to the major inland highways.

The early American village was still there, though, tucked away behind and between modern buildings and well frequented by tourists; in fact, in recent years tourism is a major industry. Along the waterfront were -- and are -- a series of restored buildings, many exhibited to the public. A few blocks away at the city center, two fine museums with extensive collections show off the history of the area. A mile from the city center, in one of the city's many small parks, visitors can tour a recently restored recreation of the original settlement. The harbor, while it holds few fishing boats, is crowded in summer with sailboats. Stately Federal era homes do

2 Like names of all informants, the names of the city and school have been changed.
grace the neighborhood surrounding the Newbridge Green and a couple of major avenues -- reminders of the city's historic past.

But the city's history did not hold still in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Mills along Newbridge's harbor and rivers held out the promise of work to waves of immigrants in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century, and they came from Ireland, Canada, Russia, Italy, and Poland to settle in various neighborhoods around the city. Mill companies built tenements for their workers, who saved to buy their own homes and built two and three family wooden houses in neighborhoods which fan out from the harbor -- Italian in one section, Polish in another, French in another. Each of these neighborhoods is marked by its Roman Catholic church, some of which are still referred to as "the Polish church" or "the Italian church." Only a generation ago, there were five parochial schools in Newbridge, one for each of the major churches. There are several varieties of Protestant churches, too, and a Jewish temple.

More recently, immigrants from Portugal, Greece, Vietnam, and other European and Asian countries have settled in the city, but the fastest-growing segment of the population has come from the Dominican Republic and other Hispanic countries. According to U. S. Census figures, there were almost two thousand fewer people who identified themselves as whites in the community in 1990, compared to ten years earlier. Meanwhile, Hispanic residents increased by about the same number. In 1991, a school district summary of census figures indicated that minorities make up 24% of the total school population, with 17.5% being Hispanic. In 1987, minorities comprised only 15.5% of the total school
population (11.4% Hispanic). Over that time period, the minority percentage at the Lincoln School has remained about 17.5%. Less than a mile from the Lincoln School, where a generation ago it was common to hear French spoken around the neighborhood, Spanish is the predominant language now.

Despite its city trappings, Newbridge retains the feeling of a small town. For a city, it's small in size (eight square miles) and in population (just under 40,000). Many of its families have resided in Newbridge for generations. Police chief, mayor, and superintendent of schools all grew up in Newbridge. The city is governed by the mayor and a city council, whose spats frequently enliven the front page of the local daily paper and furnish subject matter for conversations around town. Taxes, traffic, and parking are topics of choice. Newbridge used to boast a bustling shopping district which drew customers from all the surrounding towns, and the downtown has not yet recovered from the impact of the malls in the suburbs in the 1960's, which drained the business away. Newbridge's manufacturing base had disappeared before that, when textile companies moved south earlier in the twentieth century. Within the last five years, the two largest remaining factories have shut their local operations. The city's biggest industries now are tourism and service-related industries, especially the hospital, the college, and the courts. The biggest taxpayer is the regional power plant. Many citizens are employed by a large defense contractor in a nearby city or in other blue-collar jobs.

Newbridge has the advantage of proximity to a major metropolitan area, less than an hour away by train or bus. Five communities border Newbridge -- affluent seaside suburbs to the southeast, middle class suburbs to the north and west. Both of
the latter have city forms of government, but they are larger in area than Newbridge and they have more neighborhoods of single family homes than Newbridge does. A fifth neighbor is another small city, about twice the size of Newbridge, which has even greater ethnic diversity and economic difficulties than Newbridge. More than two-thirds of Newbridge's housing stock is apartments or multi-family homes (Hornor, 1990). Single family residences tend to be located in developments which sprang up on the edges of the city in the 1950's.

Newbridge has a population which includes a variety of socioeconomic groups, but it retains its identity as a working class community. It has a high percentage of elderly: over 25% of households include a person over 65 (Hornor, 1990). There are numerous state and city-subsidized housing projects for the elderly and some for families. In the eighties, some of Newbridge's many apartments were converted to condominiums, enticing a small but growing group of young professionals to Newbridge. Others, discouraged by the high prices of other communities, found the historic nature of Newbridge appealing.

Newbridge has six elementary schools, two middle schools, and a high school, which includes a vocational wing. About 45% of Newbridge students go on to four-year colleges, with another 30% going to two-year colleges or other post-secondary training (Hornor, 1990). Funding for schools, as in so many cities, is a yearly battle. With so many people on fixed incomes, the city council strives to keep the tax rate stable. But with a small industrial and business tax base, residential properties provide a large part of the city's operating budget. Several years ago, the state passed a tax limitation measure which restricts yearly tax increases. At that
time, Newbridge reduced its teaching force, eliminated many programs, including an alternative school, and struggled through several years of upheaval, including low morale among its staff. In recent years, the district has made steady gains. The city has taken advantage of state grants to provide in-service training for its teachers and to begin a major building project. Still, many programs are underfunded. In the early nineties, 40% of the city budget goes to education.

I live in Newbridge. I was among the group who bought homes in Newbridge for their affordability, intending to move on to a more prestigious suburb in a few years. But, like others, I grew attached to the community. I liked its diversity, its small-town feeling, its history. I liked my neighbors. And I liked a location where I could walk to everything -- shops and restaurants and the harbor. When my husband and stepchildren moved to my house, we wondered about the local schools and considered sending the children to school in the community where I taught. It was the days of the tax initiatives and teacher lay-offs. But, committed to the community, we sent our children to the public schools, and they did well. Our older son attended Lincoln School for two years, the school which ten years later would become my research site.

I debated whether I should choose a research site in my own community, but it had several advantages. I was already a member of the local culture -- the "participant" part of the "participant-observer" equation. The community, and its schools, include children from a variety of socioeconomic levels and ethnic groups. And the Lincoln School is known locally as a good "whole language" school. I
wanted such a setting. The spring of 1991 found me at Lincoln doing a pilot project, and in September, I headed there to begin this project.

The Lincoln School

The Lincoln School is both a public school (K-5, over 500 students) and a laboratory school for the state college, on whose campus it rests. Until a decade ago, there was another building about a mile away which served as a second lab school, but the college reclaimed it for another use. The college started as a teacher training institution. Teacher training is a smaller part of the college's mission now, but still a good-sized program. Virtually all elementary education majors spend some part of their schooling at the lab school -- as observers during their sophomore year, as short term "junior-block" student teachers during their junior year, or as full-fledged student teachers for a full semester of their senior year.

The school has a good reputation in the community, and its enrollment is high. Some out-of-district parents request it, and if there is room, their children are allowed to enroll. The city has recently instituted a "controlled choice" system, in which newcomers and kindergarteners may choose any school in the city; assignment requests are granted if they meet criteria for racial balance and other factors.

The school's traditional district is mostly within walking distance: a half-mile down the hill toward the ribbon of river which separates Newbridge from its affluent neighbor on the east, a half-mile north to the harbor, a mile west toward the center of town, a mile south toward the small malls where several communities' borders intersect. Along the latter route are mostly single family homes -- primarily ranches
and Cape Cods. Because of a dangerous intersection, children from that neighborhood ride the bus to school. But most of the children come from the neighborhood which connects the campus to the city center. Roads extend from both sides of the main street; on one side they lead to the harbor and on the other they reach toward the train tracks. Two and three family dwellings, set close to each other, line the streets. Most of the homes are of the same era, built in the early 1900's after a massive fire destroyed much of the city. Some of the buildings are owner-occupied, while others are rented as apartments. Even closer to town, beyond an elderly housing project and a ball field, lies the Cove, where most of the Hispanic families live.

The school, an imposing yellow brick building set near the sidewalk, sits on the edge of the college campus, and parking is a constant problem. Teachers qualify for special passes to park in the campus lots, but even those are several minutes walk away. Beth Worth and many of the other teachers arrive at school by 7 a.m. (over an hour before the children) not only to prepare for the day but to secure a rare parking spot close to the building. Before school, parents' cars line up in the fifteen minute parking zone across the street from the building as they drop their children off. Anyone who needs to stay longer than a quarter of an hour has to hike a bit. I wonder that the school has as much parental participation as it does; limited parking is a real problem. Of course, many of the families live within walking distance.

The building is more attractive inside than out. Though nearly a hundred years old, it has been renovated and it has the advantages of that former era -- spacious rooms and corridors, large windows, solidity -- without the disadvantages, such as the creaking, wooden floors that I remember from the school of my
childhood. Hallways are bright with children's work -- self-portraits outside a first
grade class, paper bag masks outside a third grade, and stories about book characters
near a fifth grade room. Most of the doorways have paper certificates recognizing
the Citizen of the Month from that class, and near the front entrance a bulletin board
lists the names of Citizens of the Month from the whole school.

Michael Daley, the principal, is respected by parents and teachers. Beth
Worth, in whose room I conducted research, describes him as "forward-looking." He
reads widely in the field of education and and is known for filling the staff mail
boxes with articles he likes and for distributing occasional one-page reflections in
which he updates staff on school events and comments on all kinds of educational
issues -- from television newscasts about education to anecdotes about his two young
sons. He doesn't cause a stir when he comes into classrooms, though he doesn't come
often. He uses the public address system effectively (and somewhat sparingly) to
congratulate children on accomplishments or to react to the their behavior at lunch
time ("We're getting there") or during fire drills ("It took us two minutes, fifty-five
seconds to exit the building; that's excellent.")

The school, like most of the schools in Newbridge, has a mature faculty. At
the staff meeting the day before school opened, I noted the camaraderie among the
faculty; everyone clearly knew each other. I overheard snatches of conversations as
teachers assembled and helped themselves to fruit, bagels, and coffee from the table
at the front of the room: "Need a card to apply for a traffic sticker?" "You look
great..." We have duty together!" "I haven't seen the schedule yet." "Hail, hail, the
gang's all here." During the meeting, Mike Daley referred to teachers by first names
only, calling on people to update their colleagues on various issues without giving background information on the issues. To me, many of the items under discussion seemed to start in mid-topic. I was often trying to figure out who Carleen was or what Ann was talking about, though no one else seemed confused. In my field notes I commented after the meeting:

It's a community. No need for intros, explanations, titles. They know the context and just pick up where they left off. The few newcomers are just swept along -- no extra explanations, at least not in this meeting. Comfortable. Lots of teasing, comraderie. They don't need transitions. M.D. assumes (and others do, too) the others know his topic. Like old married folks.

Along with announcements about schedules, lunch prices, new procedures, committees, and union negotiations, the principal made an informal speech about dreams and belief. I remember being impressed that he had carried his talk off effectively without seeming trite. He concluded by saying, "We've been trying here [in our school] -- the [professional] reading you've been doing, the volunteers. I'll stand behind you 100% and everyone in this room will do the same. We don't all have to be the same. We're all different and that's okay." Then he reiterated his major point: "If you don't believe, it's not gonna happen."

Most of the faculty come to school early and stay late, most supervise student teachers, and several lead workshops or teach courses at the college. In the staff room, as in staff rooms everywhere, teachers complain that the wider community expects them to solve all of society's problems, and they bemoan the lack of time to accomplish all they're expected to do. But unlike some staff rooms I've visited, conversations here are apt to shift into idea-sharing sessions. Over lunch, faculty talk
about which selections in the basal are worthwhile, and someone shares a new game she has learned at a workshop; classroom teachers and specialists share strategies for dealing with a special needs child. "Do you ever hand back work and make kids do it over?" a young fourth grade teacher asks Beth. She continues, "I worry that I'll take away ownership, but..." Beth's answer is unequivocal: "Sure, I sometimes make kids do things over." She says it's important to set high expectations, and the two teachers talk some more. Once I asked Beth about the positive atmosphere in the school, the faculty's commitment. She said, "It's when teachers know they own their work. That's what makes the difference. They own it."

There is an attempt to involve families in that feeling of ownership -- that the school belongs to them. The school reaches out to families by inviting them to parent/teacher conferences once or twice a year, sponsoring special events like a holiday fair, and maintaining an active parents' group. A few parents volunteer in the library or help with the newsletter. Individual teachers, especially the primary teachers, communicate regularly with parents, invite parents to visit, and encourage parents to chaperone field trips. Beth Worth has parents fill out an information sheet at the beginning of the year, on which she asks for important information about the child, ways parents wish to volunteer, etc. Beth frequently telephones parents. At conferences, Beth sits down not only with the parents, but also with the child, and they talk about successes, problem areas, and goals.
Beth Worth's Classroom: "A Learning Home"

I had been introduced to Beth Worth a couple of times in the past, but the first time I sat down to talk to her was the day before school opened in September. I wanted to know if I could use her fourth grade as my school-based research site. We sat at a round table in the section of her classroom she calls "the research department."

I was aware that the room was an unusual place. It was one of the large rooms in the school, and it was full of interesting things -- including curtains at the windows. Desks were arranged in clusters near the front. In addition to the research center (a round table and two bookcases full of reference books and a couple of globes), there were other distinct areas around the edges of the room. The first day of school I'd learn more about them as Beth described them to the children. In the back left corner of the room, "the workshop" was separated from the rest of the room by bookcases laden with art supplies and other materials. A long table formed its hub, and a small table along the wall held a paper cutter. In the middle of the back wall, along the windows, was "the library:" a bookcase filled with books, a couch with storage drawers underneath, and a low round table before the couch. Above the couch, curtains divided it from the workshop. In the far back corner was a teacher's desk, boxes of stored materials, and a small refrigerator. Then came another huge bookcase of hardcover picture books and a wide range of professional books. Next to that were two computers, then a puppet theater. Above the windows was a series of large signs to make the statement: "Respect People Animals Plants and Land Water The Air. Several plants hung near the windows or were set in large pots on the sills,
while overhead, in the center of the room, were a couple cloth clouds and a tree limb [later the prime spot for hanging mobiles]. There were posters, announcements, and maps on bulletin boards and chalkboards around the room. I noted a list of onomatopoetic words (from last year's class), a poster about achievers, and one about class rules, with a slogan above: "We're a circle, a team, a family, a crew." Figure 2-1 shows the layout of the room. Figures 2-2 to 2-6 are photographs of the classroom. See pages 61-63.

![Figure 2-1 The Classroom](image)
Figure 2-2  The Puppet Theater

Figure 2-3  The Meeting Area/ Library
Figure 2-4  Tools in the Workshop

Figure 2-5  At Work in the Workshop Area
Later, Beth would explain why she arranged the room as she did and why she included areas so unlike most classrooms. She explained the couch, for example:

The purpose of the couch is to give the room a sense of coziness and some sense of a learning home. I first got it when I taught special ed and it was even more important then that there be a learning home. But I find that I have many kids who need that coziness and a kind of aesthetic to the home. I think that the classroom should be aesthetic in the same way that I think that a home should be.

The refrigerator was partly to create a homey atmosphere for Beth herself. "That little refrigerator is there because a friend bought it for me thinking [that] since I spend most of my time here, it would make life more pleasing. And it does. It makes it nice when we have parties, too, 'cause they can put their stuff right in there."

Beth felt the couch, the refrigerator, the plants and displays all helped create a place where children could be comfortable.

I was fascinated by the richness of the environment and thought that such a setting might provide openings for children to bring their home literacies to school. I thought this would be a good place for me to explore my questions. But as intrigued as I was with the room, on my first visit, I was focused on knowing more about Beth, the teacher.

**Beth Worth: A Sense of "Own"**

Beth Worth has an open intelligent face which reflects a strong interest in people and in the world. Her light brown hair sculpts gently around her face, to chin length. She has a soft voice and a direct but not a disconcerting gaze; she looks at people when they speak and listens until they finish. She is intelligent, reflective, and purposeful --characteristics which show up in conversation. Forthright and honest,
she is unafraid to say what she thinks. The first time I described my project to her, I spoke of my interest in home and school literacies. At one point, I expressed an interest in finding out what parents think the school is all about (a theme that would lessen in importance as my study progressed; I would come to focus more on the literacies themselves and less on parental perceptions of school) and said that I would share information about what parents said.

Beth considered what I had to say, then looked me in the eye and gently responded, "Well, to be truthful, your topic does not immediately grab me as something I'm deeply concerned with this year." Taken aback, I was nevertheless impressed at Beth's honesty and directness. She continued, "I'm not sure I want an intermediary between me and the parents. I have a number of things I want to work on this year. Creativity. I'm always interested in that. Another is research [by students]. I don't feel as strong about the content areas of the curriculum as I do about the reading and writing, and I want to work on that. I've set up a research corner, and I want to get us working on learning how to find things out." She spoke of kids following through on a project. Another goal, she said, was multiculturalism and diversity. She said she wanted kids to understand that different people may look at things differently and have them "appreciate that, instead of making fun of others who are different from them." She said, "So if you had said you wanted to find out about kids as researchers, I'd have said, '"'Wow, yes, you're just what I need.' "

I tried to clarify my project better, explaining that I didn't see myself as an intermediary between her and parents. I said, "I'd like to be more like a sieve -- or a bridge." I said that one of the reasons for my interest in this topic was that we need
to understand the different backgrounds children bring so we can use their strengths.

Beth said, "If I were going to set up a research project on this area, I think I'd go about it -- which is not to say you should go about it this way -- by looking at those children whose lives are quite disoriented. I'd ask, 'What can we do to help them learn to set goals and follow through on a project, what in the old days, we'd call study skills.' As we talked about this issue, Beth told me about a research project her children did last year in groups. From the nearby display case, Beth brought out copies of those projects; they were attractive, typed, illustrated, spiral-bound books about pandas, penguins, and other animals. She described the project and how pleased she had been with the results. She said, "I think it helped them to work in groups...the social aspect of it." Then she indicated she hadn't quite realized that before. "Just in talking about it, we're thinking of ways to help those children," she said.

The more I talked to Beth, the more impressed I was. I liked her directness. I admired her reflectiveness. I gave Beth my pilot study to read, and we decided that I would visit her room and a couple of others for a while before settling on a site.

Over the next days, we talked more about my role as a researcher. I wrote in my field notes:

[Beth] asks all the right questions about how I'd proceed -- not questions of specific methods and time required so much as questions of ethics -- very concerned that I treat the children fairly, not just seeing them (or describing them) as deprived...We had a good talk about the fact that it's somewhat threatening to her, too, to be closely watched. She said, 'As a whole language teacher, you never quite get it...you never do all you'd like..." and she seemed to be saying that you can't duplicate all the beauties of the theory in practice -- "you have to work with the kids and who you are."
We kept talking, and within a couple of weeks, Beth had agreed that I could situate myself in her room.

Beth grew up far from New England, in Texas. Then, after college, a first job as a music teacher in Ohio, and a series of other jobs and educational studies, she moved to Newbridge to take a job as special education teacher, a job she held for twelve years. About six years ago, she decided to switch to the regular classroom. "I just knew I wanted to do that then," she told me with her typical self-awareness and certitude. Beth told me how her past had influenced her interest in teaching:

I remember in fourth grade I absolutely adored my teacher. Miss Finley. And she loved me, very much. She took me to her house, and I remember her parents and there was a very warm relationship there. Ever after that, I remember my teachers kind of taking a big interest in me. My mother worked in a drug fountain and she managed it and it was a small town, so everybody kind of knew that she was working very hard to raise her kids. They took a big interest in us...I think the truth is that we had a pretty tough life. And I have always felt that my teachers' interest in me caused me to want to be a teacher, to become very involved in schools. I was curious; I am extremely curious. And they really nurtured that part of me. I feel like I can do that for kids. That's why a kid who has a pretty tough background, and if I feel that I can help them cross over the bridge to success, to learning -- essentially being literate -- being curious, thinking, questioning -- it's a pretty big excitement for me to get to do that for them.

Once when we were discussing my research, Beth said to me,

"You know that African-American song, "God bless the child who's got his own?" Well, I'd like to know more about that -- each child getting his own...finding it, developing that "own," that sense of self, that power that stays with you always and that's in your core."

Beth's search for each child's "own" and for ways to support it drives much of her teaching. But for each person's "own" to be recognized and appreciated, for a range of literacies to flourish, there must also be a sense of community. Beth plans for that in the projects she offers, the rules she enforces, and the systems she designs.
One of the ways she encourages a sense of community is through class meetings. She says, "When we sit in meeting, we talk about the medicine wheel and how that's a place to be in a circle, which is a symbol of unity, and where we will seek the medicine which, for the Native Americans, is the truth." In one such "medicine wheel" in September, Beth's reaction to a spontaneous event showed her values, added to a sense of community, and set the tone for the rest of the year.

**Paul's Story: Truth, Risk, and Honor in the Medicine Wheel**

The children are crowded into the library (or meeting area) -- three on the couch, many on chairs pulled into a rough circle, others sitting cross-legged on the floor -- all circling around the low round table that reminds me of a coffee table. This area always makes me think of a living room. Janette, Penny, and Michaela are sitting on the wide window sills, and the morning sun behind them sends their shadows before them into the room.

Beth begins. "We're gonna have storytelling." She has chosen this way to help children find topics to write about. She reminds them of the oral tradition which they talked about yesterday when they read the Native American tale, *Jumping Mouse*, and continues, "Some of us will get to tell a story. Something that will interest us. I suggest that you close your eyes and flip back through your life." She closes hers behind her glasses. She's leaning ever so slightly forward with her lips ever so slightly apart, attuned to her own memories. Then Beth makes another link to the class's Native American study: "This is the medicine wheel and these are truth stories." All is quiet as each one thinks.
Finally Beth speaks again, offering to go first in the sharing. "I thought of two stories -- when I got my pony, Jitterbug, and when my father died -- one happy story and one sad story." She asks which the children would like to hear, and they vote. Sitting on the sidelines, I know which I'd vote for and I suspect the children will choose that one, too. I'm right. They want to know about her father, though the voting margin is closer than I expect. I'm surprised that Beth has chosen such a serious topic at the very beginning, and as I listen to her story, I'm doubly surprised, even as I admire her honesty and openness. Later she'll tell me she didn't plan to tell this story. It just came to her, so in her honesty she offered it. "If I'd thought about it, I might not have told it," she'll later confide. Better that she hadn't thought of it.

"I grew up in East Texas," she begins. "That's the hump on the south side of Texas. My town was in the middle of that hump. My parents divorced when I was five." Mei, whose own father is still in Vietnam, interjects in her soft voice, "That's sad." Beth agrees, "Yes, it's sad, but I survived it; I'm here to tell it." She resumes her story.

The court said, "Ella, you get the kids during the school year. Peter, you get the kids in the summer." My father lived on a farm, and we liked it there, but we missed my mother. When I was twelve and my brother was ten, my father left one morning. We kissed him good-bye and thought we'd see him at night. But he didn't come home that night. Someone came that night to say my father'd been killed. Later a man turned himself in; he'd shot him dead. He had an old grudge from when he lived on my father's farm.

My father was a big, strong, handsome man -- only thirty-two, and the other man was small. Maybe my father had pushed him around; I don't know. But as I tell this story, it reminds me that if they'd talked it over when they were young, they probably would've worked it out and never had to resort to violence. [She pauses briefly, then goes on.] This is one reason I don't like violent stories.
The children are utterly silent, looking at their teacher and listening with total concentration. Beth asks for the children's stories, saying, "They don't have to be sad." No one moves. On the sidelines, I'm wondering if anyone will be brave enough to follow that story. After several moments, Thomas raises his hand. "When I lived in Georgia," he begins, and he goes on to tell how he and his friend made popguns using chinaberrries and chased each other around the neighborhood. "It was very funny," he concludes. Beth explains to the children that chinaberrries are hard, small berries. "Like a crabapple?" someone asks. "Yes, but smaller." She says that reminds her of a story about chinaberrries to write sometime, too.

All is quiet again, no volunteers. Until Paul raises his hand. "This is when my mother died."

I can feel the tension in the air, or maybe it's just in me. I've heard teachers allude to Paul's past, and I know it's a tragic story, though no one seems to know what's truth and what's rumor, for he's new to this school. Paul's writing has already reflected a preoccupation with violence and death. Beth's story has tapped something in him; I'm surprised he's about to let it out. I can hardly breathe, and I wonder what the children are feeling. They're still and totally attentive.

Paul speaks directly, almost matter-of-factly.

My mother was on drugs and stuff. She was a suicide. There are six of us kids. She told us to break all the plates. She told us to burn the coffee table. She told us to get out and do whatever we want. We ran out. Smoke was coming out. She was standing in the doorway; she could get out, but she didn't. She went back in and burned herself.

There's a long moment of silence. What can anyone say? A few children are looking at Paul, while others cast their eyes and heads down, maintaining some distance from
this powerful revelation. I know it's important to say the right thing, and I can only feel glad I'm not Beth. I have no idea what I'd say, how I'd handle this with the right blend of sensitivity and acceptance. I'd like to put my arm around the child, but his body is stiff, his voice firm. My touch would be the wrong response, an intrusion.

Beth lets the silence lie. Just as I sense she's about to speak, a child says in a quiet voice, "Boy, Paul, you were really brave to tell that story."

I silently bless that child for the perfect response. Paul blurts out a little more about his sister being at a hospital in the city.

"For help," Beth says. "A healing place to get better."

Paul nods, and Beth comments, "That's very sad, a lot like my story. You seem very strong."

"It's nothing."

"You feel you've worked it out."

She pauses again. Then she says, "In the medicine wheel, you're a strong warrior and you've worked it out. That's something Paul knows that's important in his life and we respect him for telling it. We honor you, Paul, and the brave boy within who's told that story and worked very hard to get over that. Everybody goes through rough times. If you have hard stories in your life, you're not alone. If you're working it out, I honor you for that."

Michelle wipes her eyes, as I do. Beth waits, the children wait, then Beth asks if someone else has something to tell. After a moment, someone offers a story about a target-shooting game at Disneyworld. Then they enlist me to tell a story from my childhood. They talk about writing the stories down. Beth says, "I like to think of
writing as talking on paper." Then, meeting time over, a couple of the children hand
out the writing folders as everyone moves back to their seats. I look at Beth over the
dispersing circle of children and our eyes lock briefly, amazed at what has just
occurred.

In the lunch line later, I overhear Jemma, the toughest girl in class, whisper
hoarsely to Paul, "Did that really happen?" He nods. "I hate when that happens,"
Jemma confides, "when adults do things to their families. My grandfather..."

Throughout the year, I will marvel at the children's treatment of Paul. Even
when they complain about his excessive wandering around the room or critique his
stories for overly vivid violence, they don't put him down. They manage to be
unsentimental yet sensitive. He's one of their community. The bravery within that
Beth has acknowledged is part of his "own."
CHAPTER THREE

LIFE AND LITERACIES IN THE FOURTH GRADE

A Morning in Fourth Grade

Settling In

I arrive at school at 8:25 -- five minutes late -- on a hot, sunny Indian summer day. The children are already seated, so I weave my way around the clusters of desks, through the meeting area (or "library," as Beth calls it), to a spot near the corner in the back of the room. A slight breeze flutters the curtains as I stoop down below them to stow my purse amidst boxes of books tucked behind a standard, steel-gray teacher's desk. The desk is piled high with folders and reference books; it's obvious that Beth uses the desk mainly for storage. I've never seen her work there, though occasionally she clears an edge of it for a child to use as a quiet work space. Beth's wooden library chair (with her back pad) stands beside a nearby work table, identifying that as the teacher's spot. That table, too, is loaded with papers -- children's work, a letter to send to parents, an open planbook, in-out boxes of notices and reminders, a clipboard with today's lunch count (just completed by one of the children), folders for writing logs and reading logs, and two crates containing writing folders -- one for ongoing work, one for finished or abandoned pieces. Ramon is

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3 The day described here is a composite. All events occurred and are reported from my field notes, but not all events took place on the same day.
sitting there now, working on a word search, which includes this week's spelling words.

Kelly is in the meeting area, arranging yellow marigolds in a pottery vase on the round table which sits before the couch. Beth will later tell me that somebody pulled up the flowers from the schoolyard. "Guess what, Mrs. Voss, I went to Maine this weekend," Kelly says. "I'll tell you about it later." She plops down in her seat and reaches for her crayons.

I reflect on the atmosphere of this place. It's at once informal and purposeful, and it's one of the homiest school rooms I've ever seen. I want to know more about how that atmosphere promotes connections between the children's home and school literacies -- if it does. Beth has told me that her major goals are to develop creativity and respect for diversity. How does she do it? And does that emphasis open up spaces for the children to bring home literacies into school?

I can hear the third graders across the hall repeating the Pledge of Allegiance. Beth, in her loose-fitting purple knit dress and Innuit necklace, is just turning on the record player and announcing, "This is peace music for while you work on your turtles. Whispers are okay while you're working." Chick-a-dee chirps float from the record. A few of the children, like Ramon, are trying to find the spelling words hidden in a word find puzzle, but most are working on turtle drawings, a follow-up to this week's spelling story which relates the Native American myth that the continent rests on the back of a huge turtle.

Beth has earlier explained to me that she believes in assigning spelling words. Otherwise it's easy to lose track of spelling development. Also, she likes to structure
much of the learning around themes and, "The day goes so fast, I find it works better if I keep the themes really tight." Therefore she underlines and assigns spelling words from stories which relate to the current theme of study; most often, she writes the spelling stories herself. Monday night's homework is for children to read the spelling story to their parents. Later in the week, they write the words. Sometimes they do small special projects related to the story — as they're doing now. Usually, Beth has quiet spelling or handwriting work ready when the children arrive, and they spend a few minutes on it before turning to the rest of the schedule, which is listed daily on the blackboard.

Today's schedule reads:

8:20 spelling/ turtles
9:00 Native American projects
9:45 Writing
10:45 Snack
11:00 Independent Reading
11:50 Math
12:30 Lunch
1:15 Meeting
1:40 Music

Ramon is having trouble with the word search. He slumps in his chair and tosses his pencil down. Beth leans over him. "It takes a real strength in words to do a word search. Would you like someone who's really good at word searches to share strategies for finding words?" He shrugs and without looking up says in a voice that
challenges her, "I don't care."  "I will [help]," Thomas offers, so Beth sends the two of them to the workshop at the rear of the room. I see Lewis and Chris surreptitiously playing with miniature monster figures inside their desks. On the other side of the room, Michaela has incorporated the four sacred directions into her drawing and Beth comments on it to the class. She holds up Laura's drawing, "This one looks like a sky turtle -- very gentle, pastel colors."

"Hey, Miss Worth," calls Thomas from across the room where he's gone to work with Ramon. "The Seminole Indians live in Tallahassee, Florida. I saw it on this poster." As Thomas looks again at the poster, Ramon finds a word and speaks to Thomas. "T, r, i, e, d...That spells 'tired,' doesn't it?" Preoccupied, Thomas says yes. He turns to look at Ramon's paper again and immediately points out another hidden word.

Beth Worth comes to sit beside Ramon, and she sends Thomas to work on his turtle drawing. She turns to Ramon, who is still struggling with his word find. "Let's find 'dream,' she suggests. What'll you look for?" "D," he replies and finds the word. "Strong," Ms. Worth says, and Ramon replies, "S, t." He locates the word after a moment. Beth Worth assures him, "You're getting a lot faster. Check that one off." They both have trouble finding the word "earth." Beth says, "Let's pick a real system. How 'bout if we go down the rows." Ramon finds the word after a few false tries; it goes backwards and diagonal. Beth has him read the words on the word search list. He stops at "young." "Not old, but...." she says. "Young!" he cries. As he reads down the list and comes to the word, "letting," Ramon observes, "I didn't do
this one. I don't got 'letting.'" Beth replies, "You certainly are thorough to realize
you don't have it."

Themes

At 9:00, Carlos and Eric come into the room, returning from the resource
room. Mrs. Forrest, the Chapter One teacher, has arrived, too, and is circulating
among the children, quietly commenting on their drawings. Beth tells children to get
into their groups for their Native American projects, and they move around the room,
chattering. Paul goes to his group's area, but instead of settling down on the floor,
he is pulling the strings on the curtain of the puppet theater. Lewis chides him, "Just
like your brother." "You don't even know my brother," Paul retorts. "He knows
how to fix a car already. He knows algebra. He's fixing a truck." The two continue
sparring, until the student teacher intervenes.

The groups are each working on Native American projects as follow-up to
reading an informational article in a reading anthology. Each group is responsible
for a different subtopic -- homes, clothes, hides, and hunting. This is what Beth
means by a theme. This one started with a reading lesson, but it is more like a social
studies unit which incorporates reading, writing, artwork, and will later include
presentations. This unit will last into October, when the class will begin a
three-month Heritage unit, in which they study countries of their own heritage. In the
winter, the theme will be biographies, and in the spring, partners will research
animals and make their own books. All of the themes conclude with performances or
presentations, such as the Biography Blast in which children dress up and present
speeches as the famous people they read about. Other smaller projects and skits will
be interspersed with the major themes, such as a study of electricity in December and Irish folktales and limericks around St. Patrick's Day.

Michaela and Sandy have approached Beth for help. Their group has been making a model which includes poles (sticks) on which to hang hides and clothes, but the poles are too big compared to the clothespin people the girls are going to make. "So we'll use the saw to cut them down," Beth says. "Meet me in the workshop."

They go to the back of the room and take a handsaw from a drawer in a small side table. Brenda and Kelley and Eric and Carlos look on as the others begin cutting with the saw, then sticking the poles into holes in a thick piece of cardboard. Soon the boys leave to join their own group.

The girls chat as they work. Michaela says, "We need someone to make clothespin dolls." "I will!" Sandy cries. Kelly counters, "We all will." Beth suggests they finish setting up this part first.

As they work, the girls banter. Brenda and Sandy each claim to be part Indian. Sandy suggests, "We could make up an Indian song to go with our project." She begins chanting as she works: "Hoi, hoi, oi, ya...."

Brenda has found some cotton in a box which someone had set out on the table, and she's wrapped it around a stick. "A candle!" Kelly is playing with the stapler, stapling onto nothing and brushing the staples off the table. But now she joins Sandy at the other end of the large work table to fix the lettering on the poster they began yesterday. They erase the pencil guide marks. Brenda helps Michaela as she tries to fix uneven sticks so their clothes poles will stay up. Finally, Michaela
succeeds. As they work, Brenda chatters, telling how her brother was up with a cold last night and he kept waking her up.

Beth comments to the girls, who are taping a pole across two other poles to make a rack, "They [Native Americans] wouldn't have used tape. They'd have used gut, or maybe something from a tree." Sandy, still working on the poster, exclaims, "This is gonna be one of the best projects."

Beth suggests the children put pebbles or stones around their model. Sandy offers, "There's tons of stones down by the brook." She describes how beautiful they are, and Beth replies, "If they're especially beautiful, they [Native Americans] might have use them to decorate their clothes, don't you think?" [Figure 3-1 shows their finished model.]

Figure 3-1 Native American Model
Across the room near the puppet theater, the student teacher is supervising her group of boys as they work on making model tipis. She has cut scraps of leather for them to use, and each partnership has made and decorated a small tipi on a square of cardboard. Will had the good fortune to get the sample the student teacher made, so he has one of his own. That meant his partner, Ramon, got one of his own, as well. Ramon tells me, "I'm gonna wreck mine...Well, not really wreck it. I'm gonna take it apart."

I ask: "So you can keep working on it?"

Ramon nods quickly, "Yeh," and keeps moving and working as he talks. He's always moving. Small and wiry and full of energy, Ramon demands a lot of his teacher's attention. He tends to call out in group discussions and wander the room when he feels like it. Fortunately, Beth confessed to me at the beginning of the year that she feels drawn to him. She has quickly keyed in to his interests, and as the year goes on, she will allow him to make many projects, especially paper constructions -- Thanksgiving pilgrims and Indians, a house in a box at Christmas (with decorations), a story and display of the "heart family" in February -- usually relating them to writing. Now, as he takes the leather from the poles, Ramon tells me in his raspy voice, "I wanna change it. Put more stuff in."

He rips out beds and fire, which he'd previously made out of paper. He shows me where his original fire was. As he pulls out some things, another piece of his model rips -- the grass outside the tipi, but it doesn't bother Ramon. He merely glues it back. Soon he's cut out a circle of cloth and glues it to the leather -- the beginnings of a decorative design. "See, this is what I was gonna do." I ask if he
makes things at home and he tells me about some planes he has made. "Sometimes I take paper. Not paper paper -- you buy them in a little package and I just make 'em. I keep 'em on my bureau." He explains what he's doing now. "See, I'm takin' my poles out...They're too loose. I need new ones." He keeps his hands on the model as he turns his head to call to the student teacher. "Ms. G, I need new sticks. These won't stay straight..." Then he changes his mind; he's too impatient to wait for more. "I'll use these." He's cutting some more cloth now.

Meanwhile, in the same group, Paul is carefully using markers to draw designs around his cardboard as Eric, his partner, watches and comments. Eric will become one of my case studies, but at this point in the year, he is almost invisible to me, for he's quiet, even in an activity like this which he enjoys. Will shows the others his tipi. It has an intricate interior... with a welcome mat! The others are sitting off by themselves in twosomes, intently working.

Ramon wants my attention again. "I started something different in art...you know, when you make your own house? I'm making one of those -- a blueprint. Not in art anymore...I'm working on it still because I get bored sometimes and I work on it." As he cuts more bits of cloth and places them onto the tipi to decorate it, Ramon murmurs, "I don't know why I like Indians so much, but..."

I can see the relationships between the interests Ramon has at home and this kind of work at school. The level of activity reminds me more of play than of the images of school I carry from my childhood. Conversations are informal, children momentarily get off task (for example, Kelly's aimless stapling), but they are drawn
back in to the purposeful work going on around them. There's a feeling of motivation and attachment, a sense that this work is real.

Mei comes to ask Ramon for his Indian book. He showed up in school yesterday with several books from the public library. "Yeh, it's in my desk." He goes to get it for her, but it's not there. "Ms. G used it yesterday," but she's intently helping someone else and doesn't respond when he interrupts. Mei shrugs and returns to her group.

Mei's group is working in the meeting area next to the windows where, with Mrs. Forrest's help, they have taped a large sheet of manila paper to the window. Their topic is clothing. Janette and Penny are standing on chairs, using markers to draw a border design on the poster, while Nina, seated on the couch, leans forward onto the round table, drawing a fur headpiece. Near her, Jemma is coloring a beautiful feathered headdress. Laura is referring to a reference book at Beth's work table. Mei is sitting on the floor adding intricate designs to her drawing of a dress, and I ask, "How did you know how to decorate it?" "From a book," she tells me. "But this one I did myself 'cause the book wasn't here. It's my own idea, but I know they use beads."

The final group -- David, Carlos, Daryl, Ryan, Chris, and Ben -- is trying to decide how to proceed. They plan to draw a hunting scene of buffalos being chased off a cliff, and they have a large sheet of paper for their poster, but there are arguments about who will write or draw on it. I listen to their negotiations.

Carlos: I want to work in the middle of the [poster] paper, not on a separate paper.

David: It's too crowded to do that, too many kids.
Carlos: Some can work on the main paper. Others can do some on other papers [and] cut it out.

Ryan: We could make the background [on the large paper], then cut out pieces [from other papers] and tape 'em on. You know, like in cartoons, they have the background?

Several: Yeah, good idea.

David: Everybody likes that one.

Carlos: Who says everybody? Let's take a vote. [They vote. Carlos looks around at the others. He is the last to raise his hand, and Daryl never raises his. Carlos loses.]

Carlos is still unhappy and keeps repeating that he and Daryl do not want to draw on separate papers and add theirs on; they want to draw on the main paper. The discussion continues. They can't reach a solution. Someone gets the teacher. Beth senses Carlos' perception of an unfair solution and offers, "I've got an idea. You're gonna need lots of buffalo and quite a few Indians. How about doing the background last?" There is general agreement. Most settle to drawing buffalo. But Ryan complains he is confused and that he can't draw buffalo. Beth helps him. "If you just look at it, I think you can draw this." She sits down and picks up a pencil to demonstrate as several of the boys crowd behind her to watch. A minute later, Carlos is moaning, "I don't like my lines..." and Ryan offers him advice. "Kind of make a line, then make it go like that..."

I've noticed several examples of such cooperation this morning: sharing books, offering advice. There are problems sometimes, but the children are learning how to negotiate and work together. Surely this taps the strengths some of them learn at home through interaction with siblings and neighborhood friends, while it
helps others learn new skills. Beth is working at building a culture by expecting the children to work together as a community.

9:45 comes and goes, but despite the posted schedule, Beth does not curtail the activity. I’ve noticed that Beth frequently stretches out allotted times when children are immersed in an activity. Now that David’s group has negotiated work for everyone, there’s a hum of activity in the room. But around 10 o’clock, Beth gives the children five minutes to finish, then has them pick up and return to their own desks. "Shifting!" she says, a signal that they should quiet down and get ready for another activity.

Beth sits on an extra desk at the front of the room to lead a class discussion. She asks each group for a report of how things went for them. David shows the poster about hunting and explains plans for the drawing and buffalo to be added to it. Beth says they used teamwork. "You struggled and you coped and you strived until you really got somewhere. At first you argued." "But we worked it out," David concludes. The other groups report briefly one by one, with Beth asking each reporter how their group is getting along and commenting on the group process. Later, with the children out of earshot, she’ll say to me, "Have you ever read In a Different Voice? Is this ever it! Boys and girls...approach a task so differently." We both noted how much more calmly the girls’ groups worked, compared to the jockeying for choice jobs that went on among some of the boys -- even after a vote had been taken.
Writing

It's time for writing. As Michaela and Brenda pass out the writing folders, Beth asks who would like to share something. Ryan almost always wants to share, and a few others (David, Ramon, Ben, Michaela) are usually willing. But others never volunteer. Frequently, Beth invites individuals to read a piece or to allow her to read it. Today, she shows the class Sandy's Best Book, a bound collection of her finished writing. Sandy has been writing prolifically, and Beth goes through the book piece by piece. Beth asks Sandy if she may read a particular poem to the class. "I'd rather not," says Sandy and Beth replies, "I respect that." But Sandy does agree that Beth may read aloud another poem, "Sandman," and Beth comments, "This has great pictures. That's what writing's s'posed to do -- create pictures in your mind. With t.v., they give the pictures to you. In writing, you can make your own." Then Beth asks Chris to read his flying horse poem. He does, and then he reads his ghoul poem. Ryan spontaneously applauds and others join in. Beth says, "He's really getting going with his writing." Ryan says, "Those images. They make me some pictures. Both of these remind me a little of BFG. They're like dreams."

I make a note: creativity, again. All kinds of connections -- books, media, images, dreams.

As individuals turn to their writing, Kelly comes over to me: "Will you help me with my story?" For several minutes, she reads me parts of her story about seeing deer in Maine once when she went with her father, and she asks my advice. Then I make a quick tour of the room to see what the other children are writing. Laura and Michaela are writing on a "hide" in Indian pictographs; it's manila paper, but Laura
says, "See, we ripped the paper so it would look like it [a hide]." They explain to me that they have been referring to a handout the teacher gave, which shows many pictographs. "We wrote our own story with symbols. We can make some [symbols] up. Penny made that one up," Michaela says, indicating a symbol of connected diamond shapes, "then Janette copied it, then I copied it." Laura explains that they are leaving a list of the symbols next to their story "so parents can understand it when they come to Open House." Their activity reminds me of the codes children like to make up as they play detective.

Ramon is rushing around the room, organizing a couple friends to plan a puppet show. He found a monkey puppet amidst the pile in the corner, and it gave him an idea. Beth referred him to the book Caps for Sale the other day, but there are too many monkeys in that, so now he's planning a show based on Curious George.

A few of the children are writing poems -- Sandy's is about lace and Brenda's about lollipops -- and David is researching buffalo. Paul is working on an adventure story with a spider-man like character. His stories tend to be violent, and Beth insists that he temper that -- no guns and gore. Most of the other children are writing personal narratives. Penny is drawing a border around her work, an idea she got from the illustrations in The Star Maiden, a book the student teacher read to the class yesterday. The noise level has been rising and Beth rings a bell on her desk -- a signal she's worked out with the children -- and says, "Please respect the workers. Remember Rule #1." She's referring to the list of rules which she posted and discussed with the children the first day. It will remain up all year. It reads:
Class Rules

1. **Respect** *speak positively to and about others, respect other people's space and belongings. Work quietly so others are not disturbed.*

2. **Work hard** *follow directions the first time given, do homework, use time well.*

3. **Discussions** *raise hand, listen to speaker.*

4. **Take care** *of desk, room, and school. Clean up. Put things in proper place.*

5. **Have Self-Control** *in class, line, gym, cafeteria, bus, audience.*

**MAKE OUR SCHOOL AND CLASS PROUD!**

The workshop continues for several more minutes. Beth is at the work table and children are coming to her for editing help. I overhear, "Are you going to put that in your *Best Book?*" *Best Books* are individual collections of a child's best writing; as Beth says, they are "scrapbooks of the year." See Figure 3-2 on the next page. The first thing the children wrote to include in them were individual pieces, "About the Author." They add several pieces a term. Beth encourages students to finish most pieces they write. She once confided in me, "I don't know how teachers avoid putting pencils to [the children's] papers. I keep hearing that I shouldn't do that, but I'm not sure how...I think it's important to move them along, especially some of the children we have. They need to see something finished." She helps the children edit, but tries to avoid excessive red marks.

The *Best Books* include a Table of Contents for each term. Students also insert their goal sheets, which they do periodically, on which they state goals about learning math facts or goals about writing or reading ("I will complete three stories before Open House."). The goal sheets require that they state what they will do to meet their goals and tell when the goal was reached.
It's easy to see that writing workshop is one of Beth's favorite times of day, and consequently the children like it, too. Later she and I will talk about writing and writing instruction. Beth says she tries to encourage varied genre and wants to see students bring the research dimension to writing workshop; she's pleased Dave decided to follow her suggestion to find out more about his group topic, buffalo. She says that children at this age like fiction, too, but "they're not particularly good at it. A few have a natural sense of a story unfolding, a literary flow...It's obvious these children probably read a lot."

Beth will talk about "flow" when she speaks of her own writing, too.

I don't do expository writing. My writing is very personal. I have to write that way to get the flow. That's probably due to growing up in a culture which focused on mistakes. I'm fairly good grammatically, but I think of that less than something else...I didn't like to write. I used to be blocked. I spent
years with a journal to answer questions to myself. That opened much more of a flow than papers I wrote for college.

She refers to writing as "a vehicle for thought," and says, "I absolutely use writing for thinking. I think as I go. I like writing that flows. I'm not into much stiff writing."

Sometimes she shares her writing with the class, and she frequently models strategies, such as how to do an idea web ("like brainstorming on a spider web or honeycomb") or make a chart. She observes of the class, "This group has a feel for poetry...Chris's "Flying Horse" was a 'bird out of the nest [theme].' It's Chris growing up....I thought that was good." Later in the year -- in December and again in June, Beth will publish class literary journals, *Kids' Comments* which include at least two and frequently more pieces from each child.

Though children are still eagerly writing at 10:45, someone reminds the teacher that it's snack time. Beth asks students to take five minutes to complete their writing sheets -- record sheets with a sentence or two about what they've written today. Then out come the snacks they've brought -- boxes of fruit punch, bags of chips, cupcakes or cookies, and an occasional piece of fruit or a sandwich bag filled with carrot and celery sticks. Beth has forbidden candy. About fifteen minutes later, Beth insists everyone check the floor and clean up thoroughly; she doesn't want scraps of paper or crumbs. She has been very consistent about this and about other routines, though more than once she has confessed to me how hard it is for her to follow through every time. She loves the creative projects and can get so immersed in them that she neglects routines and systems. One day she flopped on the couch during planning time, leaned her head back, and spontaneously blurted out, "I'm worn out with being consistent!" I wrote in my field notes: "Though her eyes are as bright
as always, she seems exhausted -- not disheartened exhausted, but drained because of all the energy she's expending. She says others think she's outwardly calm all the time, but [as she says], 'sometimes I can get going and the kids get hyper. I'm trying really hard to avoid that...[to] be really consistent.'

**Reading**

Now, Beth is at the front of the class. "Shifting. Shhhh. At the beginning of shifting, it says 'shhhh.'" She waits a moment. "Many of you have been asking me for Independent Reading. I want to get the Independent Reading charts up to date, have down every book you've read. One way you could do that -- list "other books I've read." Try to get a really good, neat entry today. Would you like to have Independent Reading today?" A show of hands gives a clear majority in the affirmative. "Okay, get out your books." Everyone is getting out their books for independent reading. Several kids head for the couch, and there's some controversy over who belongs there: Beth has made a chart which lists three names a week for "couch privileges," so they check the list. Beth calls the chart "another preventive routine...we have prevented conflict by developing a system for that."

Ed Harris, the teacher next door, opens the side door and pokes his head in to say, "Just wanted to let you know that we spent that extra money from the PTA on fish for the aquarium in the library." (He names off a couple tropical kinds.) He goes on, "You'll be interested in the new Scholastic Book Club order. There's a new book about Indian chiefs." Beth thanks him; she is interested. Ed zips away as

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4 Reading charts are similar to writing sheets; they give brief information about the reading done during Independent Reading each day.
quickly as he appeared. Teachers frequently pop into the room with information like Ed's, with requests for special materials (a wrench or shiny gold paper or sequins), or to use the paper cutter. The children hardly look up.

Most everyone has started reading. As in writing, students are exploring a range of genre, though fiction is clearly the most popular. Tony, in a pink jersey, is curled in a corner of the couch reading *Where the Buffalos Begin*. Next to him, Lewis is sitting with his head back and his legs stretched out straight, his feet resting on a chair. He's holding *Wayside School is Falling Down* in front of his face. In the other corner of the couch, Melissa, in a black jogging suit and pink high top sneakers, is reading *Slime Time* without a sound, but mouthing every word. Sandy has pulled a chair next to Melissa. She has her own copy of *Slime Time*. She's taken her shoes off, and her white-soxed feet are resting next to Melissa on the couch.

Elsewhere in the room, I see Eric reading some of the *Best Books*, Derek with a book of jokes, and Carlos reading about trucks. Janette and Penny are sitting up straight at their own seats, reading novels. I see Paul go to Thomas with his book to show him a page, directing, "Read this." Thomas reads it very softly. I'm curious, so I wander over. Thomas slams the book shut as I approach and ask to read it. "Oh, am I too much like a teacher?" I ask. "Yes," according to Thomas, but Paul offers, "Well, maybe you're not too much like a teacher. If you won't tell Ms. Worth." "I won't." It's *James and the Giant Peach* with a string of words: idiots, nincompoops, blunderheads, idiots, asses. I chuckle and tell them some of the other boys were reading those words yesterday. "Do you like those words, Paul?" "Yes," he says, and Thomas adds, "Even Superman in some comics I have says things like that."
I go back to the library area. Tony places *Where the Buffalos Begin* on the table, goes to the bookshelf, and takes *People* by Spier. He holds it right up before him and reads silently. I don't know the book, *Where the Buffalos Begin*, so I glance at it -- it's a beautiful picture book with extensive text -- a Native American legend. Tony notices my interest and advises, "You can read that book if you want. It's a good book."

Beth has been at the work table conferring with Kelly. I hear only the end of their discussion. "It's a wonderful book," Beth is saying. "Why didn't you like it? Too hard? I'd like to talk to you about it. Maybe you could talk to Mrs. Voss and make a decision." As Kelley turns to me, Ramon approaches Beth, "Ms. Worth, I finished right on the date." He means he's completed his reading goal on the date he set. Beth tells him to fill out his goal sheet and put it in his Best Book.

Kelly tells me she finds her book, *A Girl in the Boys' Bathroom*, "boring and a little hard." I ask what she wants to do and she says, "Get another one." I start to agree, but Beth overhears and interjects, "I wanted to hear her read some of it." Kelly picks a part and reads to me. Jemma, in shorts and a tee shirt, comes by with a clipboard to ask Kelly, "Are you going to Open House?" Kelly answers affirmatively and points to the list to help Jemma find her name to check off: "I'm there."

When we've read two pages of her book, Kelly returns to Ms. Worth, who's helping students with their Independent Reading sheets, and explains, "I read these two pages to Mrs. Voss and I didn't understand seven words."

Beth Worth: "So you think it's a little hard?" Kelly nods. "Okay, you may switch." Beth explains to me, "Usually I like them to finish what they start unless..."
She turns to Kelly. "Maybe you'll try it later in the year." Later in the day, Beth will reiterate to the student teacher that "one of my important goals is for them to stick to something until they reach it. I'm just delighted with how they're sticking to [their goals]."

Independent reading is only one part of Beth's reading program -- the time when students choose their own books and read quietly. Sometimes during this time, they read a book together with one or two friends, with the teacher's permission. Beth talks to children about these books, or reads with a child, especially those who are having difficulty. Occasionally students choose to do projects, but they generally do little follow-up to these personal choice readings. Once in a while, the class gets together for a sharing session to talk about what they're reading, but this is not a regular occurrence. In the past, Beth has tried reading journals or logs, and she notes that other teachers in the school use journals successfully. But she has not found them to be successful. "$I never see kids write much of interest. It's almost busy work. They write a few things and that's it." She feels she "gets better writing if we read the same book, do some webbing or special things to write about -- what character you'd be and why. That gets pretty far."

This year, Beth is asking the children to complete a reading chart at the end of each period of independent reading. They list the date, the title and pages, and a few sentences about what they read. That system will work well for about half the year, but after that, the class will spend less time on independent reading and will read more books together as a whole class. In the spring when Beth reflects on her program this year, she will identify her reading program as an area that wasn't
particularly successful this year. "I know it's not in as good shape as my writing program, and I need to work on it."

A second piece of the reading program is Class Books, books the whole class reads together. These are usually books which the district requires for this grade level. Fourth graders are supposed to read (or to have read to them) *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Indian in the Cupboard*, *The Trumpet of the Swan*, *Bunnicula*, and *The Pinballs*. In order to get to all of them, Beth usually does them in a Readers' Theater with the whole class. In other words, different children take on the various roles, and they read the book as if it were a script (without reading the "he said" explanatory words and with a narrator reading the descriptions). Though this whole-class reading takes a lot of time, Beth says the children enjoy it. Reading orally helps "bring [the books] to life." She usually gives the students a packet of activities to do for each of the books (with questions about characters, various story webs, drawings) and sometimes gives a quiz -- a chance to teach how to answer essay questions:

I'm looking at how well they develop their answers. I want them to have the experience of taking tests because they need to be able to harness their thoughts and recall information, and find ways to articulate what they've learned. In the case of social studies tests, it's what I call...an open book, because I want them to use the various resources we have, including their own unit packet or books in the room -- charts, graphs, etc. So it's a way we revisit the unit and they use whatever has been created to synthesize their thoughts.

In addition to Independent Reading and Class Books, the class sometimes splits into groups -- sometimes by ability, sometimes not -- to read books or articles or short stories together. Except in first grade when she hated being in the middle
group, Beth remembers liking reading groups when she was a child. "I remember stories about going to your aunt's house and you had cookies and milk; that sounded really cozy. So I liked being in the reading group; it had a coziness to it." But she clarifies, "I don't think that has to be with a basal reader" as it was in her schooling. In fact, although the district's adopted basal is literature-based, Beth almost never uses it. "I don't believe in that stuff," she says of basal workbooks. Unlike traditional basal groups, Beth's small groups do not read in round-robin fashion; rather, she likes groups because they create a comfortable feeling of working with friends. She feels small group work is especially important for those who have difficulty reading. "The only way to get them into chapter books is in a group." Sometimes groups complete packets similar to those for Class Books. Sometimes they create projects or skits or puppet shows based on their small group readings.

Research is another major piece of Beth's reading program, and it is integrated into the thematic units. As she says, "A lot of reading is content stuff. It usually revolves around social studies." There is a great deal of incidental reading, too, ranging from directions on math and spelling papers to charts and lists which are posted everywhere around the room. Reading is not always treated as a separate subject. As Beth explained to the Chapter One teacher, Mrs. Forrest, who came to help with reading: "We're not 'doing reading,' but it all fits together. We're talking to kids..."

Math

Later in the morning, the class does a teacher-directed math lesson on writing large numbers. A few children come to the board during the discussion, then
everyone practices on a math worksheet. They end the morning marching around the room in a big circle, chanting multiplication tables as Beth keeps the beat on a tom-tom. She first has to take off her turquoise and silver eagle ring in order to be able to do it! As she does so, Beth asks the children, "Know what that eagle means? I have found the far-off land." She's referring to the conclusion of a story she read them a few days ago: *Jumping Mouse*.

"Two, four, six, eight..." Mei looks so tiny between Thomas and Carlos in the line of marchers. "Three, six, nine, twelve..." Only a few of the children -- David, Janette, Penny, Sandy -- seem to chant off each number without missing a beat. Eric, Carlos, Daryl, and Ramon appear to just mumble along. "Four, eight, twelve, sixteen..." As they get to the fours, I have trouble keeping up; I want to say the equations. Like me, the children find the fives the easiest. They go to the sixes, then repeat everything -- once more through at a faster pace. Janette's round face is rosy; she walks and chants confidently. Some of the children are urging Beth to beat "faster," when she has them return to their seats. It's time to get ready and line up for lunch. They joustle for places and are out the door.

**Afternoon**

This afternoon, they'll have a short class meeting to reassign classroom jobs.

Beth explains the meetings:

We have weekly or every couple of weeks, we have a class meeting..., which is held here in the library meeting area; we usually talk about something we did well. And then we talk about something we want to work on. So that's how our meeting goes. We, also, every couple of weeks, change jobs at that time. Last week we decided that we would choose two things we want to work on and we would post that by the rules, to remind us of how we want to improve, what we want to improve in, and will reflect throughout the
week on how we're doing. We decided at that meeting either -- each -- of the 
goals would earn five bonus points. They could earn ten with that.

Bonus points are "our reinforcement system for being on task and behaving appropriately." Beth decides how many the class receives for various work periods or days and gives a reward (such as a pizza party) when they reach a predetermined number. She gives thinking points, too -- recognition of deep thinking, often in contributions to class discussions.

The day will end today with music class, though a few children may stay after school to talk or to help around the room. Beth will be here for one or two hours after the day officially ends.

Exploring a Range of Literacies

A Literate Environment

Most mornings are not as long and uninterrupted as the one described here, for four days a week the students go to specials (art, gym, library) in the morning. On Mondays, children leave at various times for instrumental lessons. Schedules change daily -- sometimes reading comes early in the day, sometimes later. But the students can count on writing workshop and thematic work nearly every day, along with some kind of reading and at least a brief math lesson. And they can expect writing and reading to interweave with other areas of study.

Beth has tried to create what Graves (1991) calls a "literate classroom." She has many references available in the reference center (a set of encyclopedias; various books on animals, machines, places; a couple of atlases; a book with flags of the world; etc.), and she offers appropriate books when they are needed (as she offered
the book about how to draw animals to the boys above). Book talk weaves in and out of her conversations with the children (as she related her ring to *Jumping Mouse*) and in conversations among the children (Thomas' references to Superman comic books, Ryan's observation that Chris's poem reminded him of themes in *BFG*). Children's work is valued. There are displays all over the room -- "dream catchers" (made in art) hang as mobiles; turtle pictures and medicine wheels form friezes around the tops of the walls; *Best Books* rest on the chalk trays. Beth Worth talks about how important audiences are for the work the children do.

Reading and writing in this classroom are not bounded subjects. There are designated, bound time periods in which writing or reading are the focal activities. But the children also write and read in their other "subjects," as when they design posters and displays in their thematic studies. And they use reading and writing to keep records: as they complete their reading and writing charts, take lunch count, check off names on a list to indicate who is coming to Open House, refer to the chart for "couch privileges." Print is used for academic reasons (worksheets, quizzes, required assignments) and for real-world purposes (reading, writing, and researching topics of personal interest; record-keeping of various kinds; displays of important information, such as class rules). Print literacy is embedded in activities and events throughout the day.

Beth's strong interest in developing creativity leads her to provide and encourage experiences not only in print literacies, but also including rhythm and music (e.g. the math chant), art (e.g. the Native American posters and models) and drama (e.g. Ramon's puppet show). Sometimes, she allows individuals to explore
non-print media during reading and writing time; this is especially true for a child like Ramon, who cries out for attention and who demonstrates a particular interest. (In Ramon’s case, that interest is in paper constructions and models — often inspired by things he makes at his after-school daycare program.)

Figure 3-3 lists many of the activities Beth Worth’s fourth-graders undertook in a range of literacies throughout the year.

**Figure 3-3**

**Projects and Activities in Beth Worth’s Class**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing and publishing</th>
<th>Kids Comments (literary magazine)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Best Books</td>
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<td>Class Books</td>
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<td>individual papers and reports (books about cultures and about animals)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Puppet shows</th>
<th>folk tales, St. Patrick’s Day</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Heritage unit (individual choice)</td>
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<td>Curious George (group of children)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>other groups</td>
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<th>Drama or speeches</th>
<th>biography speeches (as the character)</th>
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<td></td>
<td>heritage reports</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Native American reports (groups)</td>
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<td>skits about safety</td>
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<tr>
<th>Charts, graphs, and lists</th>
<th>lunch count</th>
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<td>bonus points</td>
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<td>story maps</td>
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<td>planning webs</td>
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<td>tallies (eg. on raising hands when that as a goal)</td>
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<td>surveys</td>
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<td>topic choices for projects</td>
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<td></td>
<td>State Book Award (records of which read)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

99
Personal records
writing record
reading record
goal sheets

Drawings and paintings
flags
decorations
Valentines
Mother's Day cards
crape paper flowers
personal shields
illustrations of stories and reports
pictures to accompany projects

Models made from paper
geometric figures
Ramon's heart family

Models made from other materials
inventions
dream catchers
puppets
Ramon's Christmas house
special art (wood, clay, etc. done with
   teacher)
tipis etc.

Mobiles
dream catchers
geometric figures
holiday decorations and displays
people (biographies)

Music, poetry, and chants
*Honey I Love* (reciting together)
multiplication chants
background music in puppet shows
limericks
poetry
song about state capitals

Experiments and observations
static electricity
baby chicks
observations at home

Other
maps
time lines
interviews
Supplies and Materials

For such a range of expression to flourish, a wide variety of supplies must be readily available. Beth's large room held a wealth of stuff that she had collected over the years: besides a drawer of tools, there was an iron, spools of ribbon, multiple kinds of paper, and boxes of materials ranging from cotton balls to small dowels. I hadn't even noticed several large flat boxes stored beneath a carrel, but irrepressible Ramon was the first to discover that they held costumes. For Heritage presentations, Biography Blast, and numerous small skits and shows, Beth helped the children search through the scarves and hats and dresses to find things appropriate for their themes. The room held many unseen treasures which continually surprised me. Even late in the year, I'd discover new materials when Beth would go to a box stored in the closet or bookcase to get something a project called for -- craft sticks or wax paper or yarn.

I could see that this wealth of materials led children to new discoveries (Brenda's "candle" and projects (Ramon's puppet show based on monkeys). I noted that the availability of tools made certain projects possible, or at least more successful (adjusting the "poles" for the drying racks). Sometimes, especially in some cases (notably Ramon), this wealth of stuff helped the children link the literacies of their lives at home to the work they did in school.

Groups, Talk, and Atmosphere: Connections to Home?

Not only the availability of materials, but, more fundamentally, the cooperative group work and the workshops (especially writing workshop) seemed to encourage children to make links with their lives and literacies outside of school.
The small group work so prevalent during thematic studies and the workshop settings for writing and Independent Reading encourage talk that is not strictly related to the assignment at hand. Paul gets off task, which leads to an accusation by Lewis, and leads Paul to defend his brother. Thus Paul demonstrates some of his values -- that he'd like to know algebra and truck mechanics, too, and, more fundamentally, that he identifies with his brother. Meanwhile, Sandy and Brenda brag about their Native American ancestors, and Brenda has someone to listen to the problems she had sleeping last night.

Newkirk (1992) studied book discussion groups in a first grade class and found the most meaningful conversations were often not about the books at all, but were the personal stories and observations the children shared. Topics which at first appear to be "off task" sometimes give children the chance to confront issues that are on their minds and to inspire real critical thinking, simply because the issues are so relevant and laden with personal -- and social -- meaning. The students' "digressions ...can help to contextualize issues or readings; they can be a journey outward into the lives of students, that can allow a journey further inward, back to the topic or text." (1992, 149)

As they work informally, children not only talk about their lives outside of school, but they teach each other (for example, Ryan giving pointers to Carlos as he draws), borrow ideas from each other (the girls sharing Penny's original pictographs), share resources (Mei seeking out Ramon's reference books), and brainstorm across various literacies (Sandy creating a chant). Even as the teacher retains her function as classroom manager, she interacts informally, too, offering resources (tools,
reference books) and making casual observations which teach about the subject at hand (for example, noting that Indians might have used gut rather than tape to lash poles together). Besides sharing information, Beth shares strategies (as in Ramon's word search); at other times, she led discussions and made suggestions on ways to organize homework at home, making lists of ideas for Heritage reports, and so on.

These opportunities for conversation create an informal atmosphere more akin to home than a traditional classroom does -- leading to the kind of talk that Nancie Atwell calls "dining room table talk." In Atwell's case, opening up the class to real writing and real reading led to "reader-to-reader dialogue" -- talk that was less "academic," yet deeper and more thoughtful. (1987, 21) Beth Worth's classroom, with its workshop and refrigerator, its couch and curtains, is more homey than any other classroom in my memory, and Beth teaches through themes and cooperative learning. Does that hominess, that emphasis on community and interaction, make it easier for children to bring varied sides of themselves -- all their various literacies -- to school?

I wanted to know more about this. I wondered if a classroom organized like this one, with a teacher who encourages both creativity and respect for diversity, did, in fact, tap children's literacies which in more traditional settings often remain hidden. By getting to know a few of the children and their parents outside of school, I hoped to learn more about children's literacies -- print and otherwise -- and to see how home and school literacies worked -- or did not work -- together.
CHAPTER FOUR

JANETTE: WHEN HOME AND SCHOOL LITERACIES FIT

An Old Friend in a New Context

When I walked into Beth Worth's room the first day of school, I saw a familiar face in the crowd of children. My neighbor, Janette Dumont, grinned at me and quietly greeted me as she passed by. "Hi, Peggy," she said, just a bit possessively.

Later, I stopped by her desk. "Isn't this strange?" I said, acknowledging our shifted contexts for each other, and she replied, "It's weird. You were in my class last year, too." Until she reminded me, I had forgotten that I'd stopped by to get some information from her third grade teacher. I explained that I'd be spending more time in school this year.

Janette was used to calling me by my first name, and she wondered what she should call me in school. We decided "Mrs. Voss" was best, since that's what the other children called me. "But in the neighborhood, you can still call me 'Peggy,'" I told her, "and it doesn't really matter if you slip." After all, we had known each other a long time -- since she was three years old.

I did not at first plan to make Janette one of my case studies, so I did not pay close attention to her in class during the first weeks of school. I was aware of her, though. A big girl with a round face, Janette would be tall when she grew up -- like
her parents. Janette always looked nice. Her sweatshirt and jogging pants or stretch pants and blouses made matched sets, and often her socks picked up the same color. She frequently completed her outfit with earrings or a colorful barrette in her shoulder-length light-brown hair. Her clothes were never frilly, but they were fourth-grade fashionable.

I already knew Janette was a fine student, so I was not surprised to see how competent she was at reading, writing, and getting along with the other children. What did surprise me was how quiet she was in school. Around the neighborhood, I had always thought of her as exuberant and outgoing. I remember how, as a preschooler, she would call to me as her grandfather pushed her stroller or held her hand on their daily walk around the neighborhood. She was precocious and friendly, active and happy. In the last couple of years, I'd see her on her bike or playing on the swing set in her friend's yard. Always in the middle of the group, she seemed to be friends with everybody.

An "Old Soul"

Janette was especially good with younger children. Once in a while, she (and later her little brother, John) would come into my yard to play with my son, who's a year and a half younger than she is, and I marveled at how well she played. She seemed to hold her own, yet be fair to the other kids -- skills beyond her years. I thought of her as sensitive and self-assured -- unusual descriptors for such a young child.
Others have noted those qualities in Janette, too. Janette's mother, Donna, has a friend, a Buddhist, who calls Janette "an old soul," someone reincarnated from many lives, "a very wise child."

When our children were preschoolers, and we'd meet on the sidewalk, I'd sometimes secretly watch Janette's mother, Donna, as we conversed, wondering what she did to bring up such a well-adjusted child as Janette. I knew Donna gave full time to her role as a mother, but it was more than mere attention that she provided her children. She seemed to have the knack of providing the right amount of structure combined with a willingness to listen.

Once, Donna asked my advice as an educator. Janette was four and was not attending preschool as many of her friends did. Donna wondered if she and her husband Art should reconsider that decision. Would Janette be at a disadvantage in school if she did not attend preschool? From Janette's behavior around the neighborhood, the things Donna told me about Janette's knowledge and love of books, and the range of activities I knew she participated in with her family, I reassured Donna that I felt Janette would make a good adjustment in school, whether or not she attended preschool. And the following year when she began kindergarten, Janette loved school from the first day.

**Getting to Know Janette at School**

Now, several years later, here I was in Janette's classroom. I observed that Janette was conscientious and task-oriented, almost solemn. But she seemed to enjoy the work. She sat right next to her best friend, Penny, and I could see them
conferring about their writing or their math. They kept their voices low, so unless I stood right over them, I could never tell what they were saying.

Once or twice in those first weeks of school, I noticed the exuberance I was used to seeing in Janette outside of school. When Ms. Worth told the children they could make some clothespin people as part of their Native American display, Janette and Penny looked at each other and gave little cries of delight. A few days later, the children did some weaving, and Janette enjoyed that, too. Still, she enjoyed it quietly.

Each child had a small box on which to weave with several colors of yarn. Janette worked beside Penny and Sandy, and as they wove, they talked. Sandy carried most of the conversation, asking Janette's advice about her weaving, and chattering about such things as her mom's new desk and the dilemma of having to share rooms with siblings. She asked Janette, "Don't you wish John would move out so you could have your own room?" but Janette either did not hear her or was too absorbed in her work to answer. She kept working quietly. Then the girls had the following interchange:

Janette: I want more red. I'm gonna do this red, then black, then white...

Penny: Let's do Newbridge's colors.

Janette: That's why I said red, white, black.

Penny: Look, mine has pigtails. (Threads were sticking out the ends.)

Janette: Mine, too! It doesn't anymore. It got a haircut! (as she clips it.)

Sandy to Janette: Will you do a little for me to get me rolling? Is mine right?
Janette: Yes, it's right. Why can't you do it yourself? (She said that not in a nasty tone, but matter-of-factly. But she did reach over to help.) This is how I do. I hold it up like this when I go under...

It interested me how focused Janette was on the task at hand. She seemed very serious about it, yet she could be light-hearted like the other girls, using local colors and giving her weaving "a haircut." Janette was also a good teacher. Sandy saw her as an expert at weaving (earlier, Sandy had said, "I'm not a weaver type, I'm a beaver type"), and Janette proved a good teacher, explaining and demonstrating what to do next. She also indicated confidence in Sandy, implying that of course, Sandy could do it. Janette was responsive, helping Sandy in both words and actions. Though Sandy dominated the conversation, Janette was seen as the leader. But her leadership was unobtrusive.

She was especially unobtrusive in the large group, working quietly and speaking up infrequently in class discussions. Yet she did not go unnoticed by her teachers. Beth Worth frequently pulled Janette's writing from a stack of papers to show me. "Isn't this wonderful?" And though Janette didn't volunteer often in the large group, the teacher sometimes would read her work to the group as an example of how it could be done. One of the class's first assignments was a piece about a guest speaker named Bill Miller. Beth Worth was pleased with Janette's work and read it to the class. Not long afterwards, the student teacher chose Janette's story to read aloud, too. That one was a response to a story, The Star Maiden, which the student teacher had read to the group. She had stopped before the ending and asked the children to write their own versions. In the story, the Star Maiden sought a way
to remain on the earth. She tried many different ways but none of them worked.

Janette wrote:

The next night she came back. They led her into the great forest. They brought her to the great owl. They greeted the great owl with the maiden by their side. The Great Ones asked for the owl to turn her into a human for that was her wish. The Great Owl did and she slept in the young warriors wigwam. The next day the young warrior asked for the star maiden to marry him. She did. And a few years later they had a baby boy but every night she still goes up to the sky. Maybe you will see her glittering in the sky some night.

Janette's knowledge of folk and fairy tales was evident here in the terminology and diction ("the great forest," "the maiden," "for that was her wish") and in the story form itself. The story was resolved by in two ways: first, the one in power (the Great Owl) granted a wish, and then came the fairy tale "happily ever after" wedding and a child. Janette's mastery of this kind of literary convention earned her the praise of her teacher. The children also perceived her as one of the best students.

Janette was rewarded for her abilities as a student even though she was quiet. What was it that made her so successful? I had some suspicions about the ways Janette's home and school literacies supported each other. But I wondered if there was any significance to Janette's quiet behavior in school. When, several weeks into the school year, the Dumonts expressed an interest in my project, I asked their permission to make Janette one of my case studies. Soon, on a cool autumn afternoon, I was walking down the street to visit the Dumonts at home.
The Dumonts at Home

The Dumonts used to live in a rented apartment a few doors closer to my house than they live now. But within the past three years, both of Art's parents have died, and the family now lives on the second floor of the two-family house which belonged to his parents. Tenants live on the first. Like other homes in the neighborhood, it is set squarely on a small lot, close to its neighbors, its front porch skimming the edge of the sidewalk on the shaded, secluded street. The main street is a short walk away, and the harbor is even closer in the opposite direction. The Dumont's backyard is fringed with plants -- dahlias and iris, rhubarb and grapevines, evidence of Art Dumont's love of gardening. Beside the bulkhead to the cellar, barrels for compost keep company with a gathering of toys and outdoor supplies -- a scooter, pails and shovels, a small grill, a lawn-mower for the tiny lawn. A birdfeeder hangs high on a limb from a neighbor's tree which overhangs the yard. Often Janette and her six year old brother John tug on the pulley which brings the feeder down so they can refill it.

Since they moved, I've been to the Dumont's only once or twice, and I wonder whether I should go to the front door or the back. I decide on the back, the one the family uses. There's a tiger cat just inside the entrance mewing to get out. I've seen it around the neighborhood for years, but I don't know its name. I call up to see if I should let it out. Art's deep voice comes floating up from the basement overlaid with Donna's from upstairs, so by the time I realize they are saying yes, the cat has changed its mind and gone back up to the second floor. I follow. The dark narrow stairs with their rubber treads and varnished matchbox siding remind me of my
grandparents' apartment. The small landing at the top is similar, too. Recycling bins and stacks of newspapers lie there, next to a coat rack overflowing with jackets.

Donna welcomes me. A tall, casual woman with medium length hair and no make-up, she's dressed as I usually see her -- in slacks and a shirt. Later she'll tell me that her interest in comfort over fashion sometimes frustrates Janette, who has become quite fashion-conscious in recent months. As I settle myself at the kitchen table, Art comes up from the basement. Even more informal than his wife, he's wearing a flannel shirt over a t-shirt and loose-fitting work pants spattered with paint. He sits at the table to repair a puzzle box, and I'm secretly glad he's not standing, for he towers over me. His height, combined with his full beard, deep voice, and oft-expressed opinions make him a forceful presence, and though I've known him for years as a generous neighbor and a friendly, open person, I'm still sometimes intimidated by him. Today, he has cut a piece of cardboard to replace the damaged bottom of the box. As we talk, he fashions it to fit, frequently jumping up to get the scissors, to put them away, to search for an old schoolbook. I'm secretly amazed at his project; I would just get a new box! We three adults sit at the table. We can hear Janette and her six-year old brother John playing in the next room; we can see them if we crane our necks to look through the doorway. They're making a puzzle.

The kitchen is comfortable -- full, but not too crowded. The formica-topped table is set next to the window. Between the table and the doorway, there's a small metal cabinet with a radio on it. At the far side of the table is the refrigerator, its face covered with memos, messages, and the children's artwork and school papers. On the room's inner wall is a small counter and the stove. Beyond that, a pantry contains
the sink, cupboards, and more counters. The hallway which leads to the bathroom and two bedrooms at the rear of the house is dominated by a large bulletin board beside the phone. Much of one side of the house is the living room and a room which was designed to be a dining room. The Dumonts use it as a sort of office/playroom. It holds Donna's desk and several bookcases, as well as a built-in china cabinet. To the front of the house is a landing at the head of the front stairs and a small area just inside the front porch. I'll later discover that tiny room is Janette's private place where she keeps her desk; Donna tells me the house's original blueprints labeled it a sewing room. The family hopes to finish the attic so the children can have individual bedrooms on the third floor.

On this and subsequent informal visits, I'd confirm much of what I already knew about the Dumonts, while learning new details of their lives and literacy. Both parents are college graduates; in fact, they met as students at the local college. While Art grew up in Newbridge -- in this very house, in fact -- Donna comes from a town about fifteen miles away.

Art and Donna Dumont

Like many in this neighborhood a generation ago, Art's first language was French, and he and his younger brother went to the local French parochial school. "There was no reading in this house," he told me. His father worked up to sixty hours a week, and his mother worked, too, so there simply may not have been much time. He hated reading until he majored in English at college (mostly because "it was convenient") and encountered Siddartha. In elementary school, he liked "the cute little workbooks. I liked the stories. You read one, get to the next story, read it, get to the
next story. I liked to get to the next story. Same with Siddhartha—it's short. In ninth grade, they gave us Ivanhoe. Why not choose something shorter? I remember God is My Copilot more than Ivanhoe.

But though Art claimed he liked only short books and that there was no reading at home, he did read comics and can talk intelligently even now about the illustrators and authors of various comics. "Stan Lee and another developer at Marvel made a real effort at grammar and vocabulary. I remember learning the word, 'asphixiation' from a comic." He said, "My reading was always topical. School didn't relate. I'd be reading Einstein: A Man and His Universe, but schoolwork I was not interested in." Janette, in the next room with her brother, heard her father's comment and reminded him, "You have a ton of books." For Art has become an avid reader. He reads mostly books about nature. Donna likes novels.

Donna told me, "I have always been a reader. I took to reading like a duck to water." She remembers the first two weeks of first grade when she was put into the second reading group. "There were three reading groups—the best one, the middle one, and the worst one." When placed in the second one, "I was highly insulted. Even at that early age, I knew it wasn't the best, and it bothered me." But a student teacher rescued her and had her read to the teacher, who agreed to move her up. "It was like status." Donna wonders how she became such a reader, for her parents did not read to her. Her dad had two jobs, there were seven kids, so there was probably never time. Still, "even as a young child, I had the sense that if I could read, I could do everything else." She used to take her younger siblings with her to the library.
Donna also used to like to write. On her own, she wrote poems and stories. "Writing was something I enjoyed." She got a diary in sixth grade which she kept up, doing "an entry every day for about five years." I was incredulous and Donna explained, "I was the oldest girl, a responsible girl. I was clear on what I had to do and what I couldn't do." She lost her diary and some other childhood things, either in a move or at her old house (her mother was not a saver).

In school, Donna was "painfully shy. My mother still has the kindergarten report card in which the teacher wrote, This term we discovered Donna can talk.' Until then, I hadn't said a word." Around fifth grade she was more willing to state her opinion, but by seventh was painfully shy again. She remembers being glad she didn't do well in math. A boy had called her an egghead, and it "cut right to the heart." Even though she was a good student and enjoyed learning, she didn't want to be seen as an egghead. "I used to feel I had to apologize for it (love of learning), as if I was trying to be teacher's pet, which I wasn't." She tried to talk to her parents, but they were overwhelmed with seven kids and just told her to "go and do the best you can." She remembers "truly hating junior high." As Donna talked, I thought of the research by Gilligan (1990, in press) and by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986), which shows how girls are often silenced and their feelings minimized.

Donna worked in the health care field before her children were born (she also had a stint as a carpenter's helper), but except for a short time when she worked a few hours a week at a friend's bakery, she has not worked since her children were born. She told me, "I was lucky I got to stay at home with my kids." Now that John is in
first grade, she has been working as an office aide at the school for three hours a day. When the job became available, she was already well-known at the school, so she got the job. She hopes to return to the health care field someday.

Art has held a couple different human service jobs in the past. At one time, he worked in a public school as an aide to special needs youngsters. Later he worked for a mental health hospital in direct patient care. For a time, he held an office position in the hospital, but he disliked the bureaucracy. Now he works at the same facility repairing and adapting equipment for the handicapped patients -- a job he prefers because he likes being active and working with his hands. In his spare time, he sometimes helps neighbors with their landscaping.

Both parents like the Lincoln School and have been actively involved with its parent organization since Janette started school. Art is currently vice president of the parent group, and Donna co-edits the newsletter. Donna says they have always felt welcomed at the school; some of the teachers send frequent communications home and invite parents to stop by. Donna does so occasionally and briefly. Art sometimes chaperones field trips and he contributes items for the school's holiday craft fair. Donna has a good understanding of what Beth Worth's teaching is all about. She told me:

I get this sense -- I may be wrong -- that a theme seems to be running through. Not like when we were kids with separate social studies, stop, math, stop, reading, stop. It's a beehive of activity. Kids seem to be working on all different things but a theme's running through. It takes more account of how kids learn...For Janette, reading comes easy to her. For others, it takes maybe different approaches to get to them. I'm always so amazed at the level of activity throughout the school.
Donna and Art have made it a point to be involved and informed about their children's school.

**Parent/Child Interactions**

Donna was the third of seven children. As the oldest girl, she had many responsibilities and restrictions. She talked about how overwhelmed her parents were with the large family and her father working two jobs. She felt it was hard to talk to her parents, and she wanted to cry out, "Why don't you pay any attention to me?"

Those memories have affected her parenting. She says, "I wanted my kids to be able to ask for things they need and to express their feelings." She smiled as she confessed, "Sometimes it backfires. It's not always convenient to have kids speaking up. Art'll say, 'Who told them they can express their opinion?' Well, we did!"

Donna talked often of how important it is to listen to children, to help build their self-confidence. "We talk *to* our kids," she said, "not at 'em."

Gordon Wells' longitudinal study of children from aged three to ten found that the quality of parent-child interaction was a major factor in later language development and school success. Parents who assumed that the child had something sensible to say often supported the child's meaning and built on it. (Wells 1986) In *Child's Talk*, Jerome Bruner (1983) makes a similar point that mothers "scaffold" their children's talk. Harste, Woodward, and Burke (1984) prefer the term "tracking " because it acknowledges the child's active part in the transaction, rather than ascribing the dominant position to the adult.

I think this kind of transacting is part of what Donna means when she talks about listening to her children. But beyond supporting the children's language
development, the Dumonts try to support the feelings behind the ideas. Donna and her husband want to hear what Janette and John are feeling, and in doing that, they attend to them and accept what they say, even when it may be inconvenient and even when they have to insist on their adult perogative to make certain decisions about which the children do not agree. At the same time, they create a communication pattern which encourages children to formulate and state their ideas.

One day, when Janette and I sat on the floor in her special space, looking through papers and notebooks from her desk, I overheard a conversation between the adults and John in the kitchen. John had agreed to sign up for a program about animal babies at a nearby museum, but now he didn't want to go. Both parents listened to him and acknowledged his feelings, but they calmly insisted that he had made a commitment and was expected to follow through. "I hear what you're saying, John," Art said. "But you signed up for it and you have to go. I really think you'll enjoy yourself. If not, you can tell me I was wrong." Then he shifted the emphasis, inviting John to explore the subject matter even now. "Don't you have some books about baby animals?" he asked, and John went scurrying to find one.

Art and Donna told me that Janette holds her own in discussions with her father, and that sometimes they "really go at it." These interactions did not, of course, ever occur when I was around! Art also told me how indignant Janette felt about the favoritism (real or perceived) that her gym teacher showed toward the boys. Janette would not complain to the gym teacher, but she freely expressed her opinion at home, where she knew it was safe and would be heard -- as her ideas and feelings always were, even though her arguments were not always accepted.
Keeping T.V. in Its Place

Donna talked about some other parenting decisions which were influenced by her reflections on her own upbringing. Though her parents were both readers, she can recall only one occasion when a parent, in this case her father, read to her. "We watched a lot of t.v.," she said. "I think they used it as a babysitter." Her feelings about television are strong: "I'd get rid of it." As she said that to me, Art's reaction came quickly, "You're not gonna take away my sports!" But they agree that t.v. should be limited for the children. And they agree that some shows are truly worthwhile. Donna explained:

"There are lots of good things on about nature; we watch those as a family. And the Discovery channel has amazing things on it. Television can be good, but it has to be controlled. John gets seduced by it. I bet he'd sit there all day. We have to put limits on how much he can watch."

Donna doesn't even like to watch news on television. "Too much fluff. In the time it takes, you could read the entire Christian Science Monitor. I'd rather listen to All Things Considered on PBS." Art, too, prefers the in-depth radio show. "The guys at work take me with a grain of salt," he said. "But they're getting used to PBS."

One day as Donna and I sat in the kitchen, John and his friend Sherri rushed all around the apartment playing Batman. They'd just seen the video and Donna commented, "They don't just watch it; they play it. I don't feel so guilty throwing on a crummy movie when they create a whole fantasy around it. They play out certain favorite scenes."

While John will clamor to watch t.v., Janette says, "I'd rather read." Donna says with some satisfaction, "She gets bored with t.v."
At age nine, Janette is already a voracious reader. She frequently has several books going at a time -- *My Side of the Mountain* and a *Babysitters Club* book at home, while reading *The Pinballs* with the class at school, and planning to start her next book from the *American Girls* series as soon as she can. I gave her two books for Christmas, and she read both during vacation week, along with a couple other books she had set aside in advance, planning ahead for her vacation reading.

Janette and her brother sometimes read together, too. On one of my visits, they were reading Shel Silverstein poems. On another, they were looking at a *Where’s Waldo* book. I asked to see it. Janette informed me, "This is the yellow one, so it's hard." I hadn't realized there were different levels of difficulty in these books, in which the reader has to look for the tiny figure of Waldo amidst hundreds of other miniature people in a very busy illustration.

John was excited about the action in one of the little drawings: "Look, he [a person in the drawing] ducks when he shoots it to him." Janette confided to me, "He'd rather do this than t.v. It's wicked hard." Then she explained the way the book works. "If you finish, you can go to the back and look for other things." She turned to show me the lists of things at the back. The instant she turned back to the illustrations again, John pointed to a picture and cried out, "Here's a funny one."

Both the children loved the book, but their reactions were strikingly different. Impulsive young John contrasts with the more socially-oriented Janette who conscientiously demonstrated the book's key characteristics to me. Art and Donna sometimes comment on the difference between their children. Donna asked me, "Ever read the cartoon, *Calvin and Hobbs*? John is Calvin!" Like the cartoon
character, he's full of activity, mischief, and imagination. Janette is calmer, and I wondered, as Janette has gotten older, has her quieter nature been due to her identification with her mother? Has school played any part in it? And is there any relationship between that characteristic and her literacies?

**Friends Sharing Literacy**

Quiet as she is, Janette isn't always quiet at home. One afternoon, I stopped by to visit while Janette's friend, Penny, was over to play. I came to the front door this time, rang the bell, and could hear the children's feet thudding down the stairs. The door swung open inward, so I could hear the girls' giggles before I could see the reason for them -- their faces were brightly colored with streaks of blue, green, red, and yellow face makeup. They greeted me enthusiastically and showed me upstairs.

I hadn't seen Janette at home for awhile, and I was struck once again with her exuberance, so different from the quiet competence she showed at school. I was even more surprised at Penny, who was just as outgoing. At school, she was as quiet as Janette, and since I did not know her outside of school, it was she who kept me off guard all afternoon, with her observations and explanations. She was downright chatty! She frequently interjected comments, overlapping her talk with that of Janette and even me, whereas at school she seemed to primly wait her turn (and to raise her hand sparilly). In this setting, both girls were eager to talk.

That afternoon, Janette first showed me the folder she'd compiled at school for her Native American unit. Then she asked me, "Ever heard of the American Girls Collection?" I hadn't. She had gotten one for Christmas, so she took it out as Penny explained, "You can order stuff they did, like weaving, gimp. We got the catalogue."
Janette showed me the catalogue. "You can order the dolls and the clothes they wear." The collection was a kit containing books about a few fictional girls from different times in American history, along with a paper dolls, games, an album in which to fill in family heritage, and a journal, which Janette has begun keeping.

As they flip through the catalogue of other specialty items, Penny observes, "Molly [one of the characters and therefore also one of the dolls] is wicked cute." Janette offers, "In this book she wanted red rubber boots, but it was in the war and they didn't have rubber. She had to wear her brother's old ones." (She showed me a picture in the journal.) They share stuff from books in here." (She read me a quotation.)

"I read a little of that book," Penny said.

"I read [all of] that one," Janette replied.

"What is it like?" her friend asked.

"It's good. Her brother sprays her with a garden hose. It's wicked good."

Penny told Janette, "You read more (of those books) than me."

"I read almost every one," Janette acknowledged.

It intrigued me to discover that Janette's friend Penny knew about Janette's reading habits -- and vice versa. I noticed this at school, too. When Janette casually said to Penny, "I'm almost done reading Matilda," Penny replied, "Already? You just started reading that on Tuesday."

Penny also knew about Janette's penpals. At the kitchen table, we talked about the kinds of writing Janette does at home, and she told me, "I just sent a bunch of pen pal letters." Janette turned to Penny, "Oh, by the way, JoAnne just got
glasses." Janette had previously told me about her different pen pals, so I asked, "Is that the one in Thailand?" Before Janette could answer, Penny did, "No, [the one] in Australia."

These children have a literate community that goes beyond their classroom and beyond their parents' homes. Reading is one of the things they do and share, just as they chat about who got which grab bag gift at the holiday party and who scored the goals in the soccer game. Literacy is part of the fabric of their lives.

**Humming Along: Apprenticeship in Reading and Writing**

**Early Lessons**

How did Janette develop such a love of reading and writing? Perhaps because she has been read to her entire life. Donna told how surprised she was at Janette's one month check-up when the pediatrician suggested she start reading to the baby. "He said it's like listening to music. You may not understand the words, but you can hum along."

Donna continued, "I was already into talking to her, so I started reading. At first it felt strange, but I fell into it. As Janette got a little older, we'd read for hours; sometimes we'd read a book five times. I'd go to yard sales and buy kids' books. When she was two, we started going to the library to story hours."

Sometimes her child surprised her.

"At Christmas, when Janette was in first grade, my sister-in-law got out one of the Dr. Seuss books and asked Janette if she could read it. I thought, 'She can't read that.' But she sat right down and started reading it. I was stupified. I never liked reading Dr. Seuss books, but kids love them. My brother can remember reading Dr. Seuss as a beacon of light amongst otherwise boring books to read. That was kind of interesting. He and his wife gave my kids their Dr. Seuss books..."
Donna remembers her daughter's early writing, too. "Before she could write, she was pretending to write. I'd give her old forms and things we weren't using anymore [and] a clipboard, and she'd just do scribbling. I remember that with John, too." Now each child has an old typewriter, bought at yard sales.

The parents learn from their children, as well as the other way around. Until recently, the children would each pick a book to read at bedtime, and when Janette was in second grade, Janette picked *James and the Giant Peach*. "Until then, it never occurred to me to read chapter books," Donna said. "Janette had heard [that book] already, [and] she wanted her brother to hear it." As Denny Taylor found in her study, *Family Literacy* (1983), children's ideas and responses affect the reading experience and help it to evolve.

For Janette, reading is both a personal pleasure and something to be shared. She still occasionally listens in when her parents read to John, and she sometimes reads to him. Art told me a story of a time she was reading to her little brother and Art fell asleep. "She woke me up to tell her a difficult word, then went right on reading and I went back to sleep." She almost always reads before bed. One day she told me, "I woke up early this morning, so I just read for half an hour until it was time to get up." I asked Janette when she finds time to read with all her after-school activities. "I fit it in somewhere," she replied.

**Organizing through Print**

Studies that are reported in the popular press tend to stress the connection between reading to children and later success in school. Certainly, there is no doubt of the positive relationship. But there are other, more subtle uses of print that
influence children's understanding of the power of print and the ways that people come to make meaning with and from print. Different communities use print -- or story -- differently (Heath, 1983; Fishman, 1988; Delgado-Gaitan, 1987; Deyle, 1987). Young children understand the functions of print long before they have control over the conventions of written language (Harste, Woodward, and Burke, 1984; Smith, 1988; Laminack, 1990). For her whole life, Janette had been learning ways to read and write -- and to make and take meaning -- by watching and participating in the methods used within her family.

In the Dumont home, Donna appears to be the one who keeps the family organized, and she frequently uses her literacy to do it. The house is clean and comfortable, casual yet orderly. The calendar behind the entry door is full of writing, mostly Donna's. An open notebook with a list-in-progress lies open on the kitchen table. But the bulletin board gives the clearest evidence of Donna's record-keeping and organizing for the family (even as it also illustrates the interests of different family members). About three feet square, it's covered with information:

- several lists of phone numbers (including one in John's handwriting: Donna explains, "he just wants to be part of it, too.")

- bottled water delivery schedule

- children's schedule of after-school activities

- bird pictures and labels

- classified advertisement

- note re dentist appointments

- magnet that says "love"
• buttons which served as entry tickets at New Year's Eve party in the city
• anti-nuclear button
• party invitation for Janette from Michaela
• credit card receipts
• a packet of marigold seeds
• information on use of a special pan
• recipes cut from the newspaper
• recipe on a label from a jar
• a brochure about a nature trail
• list of addresses
• instructions for the Heimlich maneuver
• "Guess Who's Forty" balloon in honor of Donna's recent birthday.

On a hook attached to the bottom of the bulletin board is a clipboard which holds several pieces of information from school, information about Campfire Girls, and another recipe. Figure 4-1 (page 126) is a photograph of the bulletin board, while Figure 4-2 (page 127) shows the refrigerator, which is mostly covered with children's work.
Figure 4-1 The Dumonts' Bulletin Board
Figure 4-2 The Dumonts' Refrigerator
Like her mother, Janette likes to have things in order, though neither one seems obsessive about it. One day Janette showed me all the stuff she keeps in and around her desk. Next to her desk is a cardboard container divided into nine cubbies in which she keeps sketch pads, paper, old papers. On the floor beside the desk in a container of notebooks, her *Judy Blume Memory Book* (a journal which she used sporadically last year), a scrapbook, and a few other papers. She keeps her markers and crayons in her desk drawer. Atop the desk are various additional supplies and several shell crafts, which she made at the after school program — a decorative hat, a box, some shell sculptures.

As Janette looked through her stuff, she frequently exclaimed over some piece she'd forgotten, and she referred to some of it as "just junk; I haven't looked at some of this in a long time." She got out her old school papers from previous grades to show me. Her mother has kept them in two magazine files; one is labeled "Kindergarten-grade 1" and the other "grades 2 and 3." Janette chuckled as she looked over her old work. "What's this?" she exclaimed, reading a composition. "I didn't even write this...Oh, I see, it's a poem one of the kids wrote about our class." She pulled out a couple of bound books to show me — *The Mouse Mystery* and *The Witch Who Went to School*. We also looked at pages of her *Judy Blume Memory Book*. Janette found it interesting to read some of the author's memories which introduce each section, and she enjoyed rereading her own comments. "It's fun to look back and see what happened before in your life."

Janette's propensity to save and value print, plus her attempts to file it in an orderly way, remind me of the way her mother has saved Janette's school papers.
Donna talks about how she tries to organize family photographs, too, but it's hard to keep up with them. She wishes her mother would sort through the drawer of old family photos and is pleased her parents are compiling the family's 8 mm. movies from her childhood. Art, too, has saved books and papers from his school days.

Janette has adapted this reverence for family history (or at least her personal history) both in her diary-writing and in her scrapbook. Her uncle gave her the scrapbook one Christmas and she has filled many of the pages with information about her favorite rock group, New Kids on the Block. She has cut pictures from magazines, but also has a signed photo and a ticket stub from the concert she attended. For members of this family, literacy helps connect to personal past and memories.

Janette is familiar with lists and charts as ways to keep records and ways to make things happen. I noticed a chart on the refrigerator and asked about it. Donna explained. "We've been having a hard time getting John ready in the mornings. It's been crazy around here. So we were talking to him about getting ready the night ahead by choosing his clothes and deciding what he wanted for breakfast. Janette said, 'How about if I make a chart?' So she did. Now we have to keep to the routine and fill it in every night." The chart has columns for clothes and breakfast, with each child's preferences listed for each of the two items. Thus, Janette and her family use print to help them plan ahead.

I see the morning chart as yet another example of not only Janette's print literacy, but also of the way her family encourages her and John's participation in thinking about problems and making decisions. A problem was stated and put up for discussion, the family came up with a possible solution, and Janette thought of a
tangible way to keep a record. She did not come up with such a possibility out of the blue, but out of experience with other kinds of charts around her home.

Such chart-making, like list-making, is a strategy used by many families, but not all. While common in mainstream homes, it is less so in certain cultures. I was astounded when my colleague Dan Ling Fu told me people in China seldom make lists. I had assumed list-making was a universal way of using literacy. Teachers, who are generally part of mainstream culture, have a particular responsibility to confront such assumptions and realize that not everyone operates in the ways they do. School is a comfortable environment for a child like Janette because it requires skills very similar to the ones she has been developing throughout her life. But it is not necessarily so hospitable to all children. Heath (1983) showed how ways of taking meaning vary in different cultures. Children from a black mill community in a rural area (Trackton) were wonderful story-tellers but had little experience with books and lists. Children in a fundamentalist Christian community read books literally, so they, too, did not have the skills that schools assumed -- and that were needed for academic success. Often, the children's strengths -- such as the oral strengths of the Trackton children -- went unrecognized and unrewarded.

Print All Around

When I asked Janette why it's important to be able to read, her first response was, "if you want to drive..." Then she continued, "Everywhere you go, you have to read."

Janette recognizes what it's hard to ignore in our modern world: print surrounds us on our roads, in our shops, nearly everywhere we go. She and her
friend Penny helped me brainstorm all the kinds of things they read in the environment. We started by looking around the kitchen, and in a few moments they came up with this list:

- calendar
- paper cups labeled with name of a pizza shop
- "my mother's notes"
- magnet from Mrs. Worth (map of the state with cities on it)
- wrappers from Campbell's soup cans ("Dad's work is saving them")
- newspaper -- Janette reads the front page most days, the funnies and Fun Page on Sunday and the Kids' Page (a page of children's writing) on Saturday ("I was in it; did you see it?")
- ice maker (directions on it)
- notes from John's teacher (posted on the frig)
- labels and signs all around ("Maxwell House")
- candy package
- vitamins
- sayings
- lunch menu

By fourth grade, much of Janette's reading of environmental print is incidental, and she's hardly aware of it. Donna told me she was surprised one day when Janette picked up the local paper on the way into the house, glanced at the front page and said, "Oh, amazing! No murders, rapes, or robberies today." Donna commented, "I didn't even know she was aware of any of that stuff." Even as Janette
and Penny and I brainstormed, Janette's attention drifted from our conversation as soon as her mother placed the newspaper on the counter. President Bush had fallen ill that day, and Janette reported the fact to the rest of us — information she gleaned from the headline and the caption under the front page picture. Were it not for her comment, Janette's quick interaction with the newspaper might have gone unnoticed.

Denny Taylor noted the incidental, unnoticed interactions with print of children in the suburban homes she reported on in *Family Literacy* (1983). Such incidental reading appears to expand as children gain more experience with print and can more readily decode or encode. I've noted my eight-year old scanning labels, reading cereal boxes, and observing billboards, usually without any recognition from him that he is reading. I'm certain I miss more such interactions than I notice, and I suspect that's the case in the Dumont household, too. Donna's surprise at Janette's acquaintance with the news may indicate that Janette's interactions with the newspaper are fleeting, more than they indicate that they are infrequent. Janette confirms that interpretation when she tells me she does, in fact, "read" the front page almost every day.

**Using Print to Relate to Others and to Self**

Among the eight intelligences identified by Howard Gardner in *Frames of Mind* (1983) is "interpersonal intelligence," the skillful interaction with and sensitivity to others. Gardner claims that people who have highly developed interpersonal skills are often leaders. I commented earlier that I noted Janette's interpersonal skill at a very young age. Now that she is older, those skills are still evident.
Janette is perceptive of other's behavior. Her mother told me about a chain letter Janette received in the mail. "You had to send it to five people, and Janette sat there thinking and said, 'If I send it to Michaela, that's okay, she won't break the chain, but if I send it to Michael, he'll send it to Jamie, and he'll break the chain.' " She pondered what she knew of people and predicted their reactions, then made her decisions.

Janette likes everyone to get along. One day, John's friend, Ian, had stopped by, and the two six-year olds were headed out the door. Ian asked John if his older brother, Nick, could play. John was immediately uneasy, and he made a face, which Ian didn't see. Janette called after her brother, "Just play with Nick and get along, okay, John?" John turned back to protest, "He doesn't like me." "Why would he want to play with you if he doesn't like you?" was Janette's logical argument. "He likes my toys, not me," said John as he headed out after Ian, showing that he has interpersonal awareness of his own!

Janette's interest in interpersonal relationships spills into her reading and writing. Print, for her, can be a way to connect with others. One of the reasons she gave me for the importance of reading was: "Well, let's say I just got Michaela's birthday invitation, I wouldn't know where to go or when. I'd miss the whole thing."

Beyond invitations, Janette writes and receives letters. She has many penpals. One, from the Phillipines, is a relative of a nurse Janette met when her grandmother was in the hospital. When the nurse mentioned a child Janette's age, Art suggested Janette get her address. Another is the niece of friends. She's an American who lives in Thailand with parents who are missionaries. Janette has been corresponding with
her since age five; they met when the other girl was in the states on vacation. "I sent her a Christmas card," Janette explains, "and she wrote back." Another pen pal lives in South Carolina; Janette met her when her family vacationed at a relative's cabin in Maine. The fourth is from Australia, the only one that Janette found through school. Her third grade teacher arranged correspondence with a class there. Janette says, "I had four in Australia, but Joanne is the only one who kept writing. We exchanged pictures. She sort of looks like me!"

Combined with her interest in others is Janette's inner life and her ability to be tuned in to her own feelings — what Gardner calls "intrapersonal intelligence" (1983). In her diary, Janette writes mostly about the day's events, though she occasionally comments on her friends and relationships. On a page in which there are blanks to fill in information about herself, one of her notations is "I would like to marry Eddie, or be really close." Last year's occasional diary, the Judy Blume Memory Book, included lots of pages in which to write about feelings. Donna commented that one thing she liked about that diary is that the author's comments "acknowledge that you can be sad sometimes as a child; you don't always have to be happy."

Janette has faced sadness in her young life; her grandfather died the summer after first grade, and during the autumn of Janette's third grade year, her grandmother was very ill and was hospitalized for several months before she died. Donna told me:

Her grandmother Claudette's death was very hard on Janette, especially watching her decline. I took the kids to see her often in the hospital. At age seven and eight, Janette would go and get juice or ice and feed Claudette. She knew all the nurses, she knew where to get the ice. She was just wonderful
with her. But one time she came home and cried and said, 'I don't want to go back.' I told her, 'You don't have to.' The whole thing was very hard, but I think it helped her accept death.

Several times, Janette has written about her grandmother, whom she called "Memere." In second grade, she published a book about "The Best Grandmother in the World," and the weekend her grandmother had the seizure that sent her permanently to the hospital, Donna saw Janette "sitting in the living room writing furiously. She wrote a whole book about Memere, all her fears. It was so sad I cried when I read it, yet I was so happy she could put that down on paper, that it could be a comfort for her." This year, Janette wrote an acostic about Memere at Thanksgiving. Both at home and at school, with regard to a very important relationship in her life, Janette used her writing to explore her feelings.

**Taking on Mom's Roles**

Like her mother, Janette is good at interpersonal relationships and interacts cooperatively with others. Her advice to her little brother to "Just play and get along, okay?" sounds very much like a mother's voice. Janette's uses of literacy resemble her mother's. She recognizes her father's literacies -- growing things and fixing things, as well as reading and writing -- and she learns from him, too. She know the names of many plants, for example, and she likes some of the sports he likes. But Janette seems to primarily identify with her mother's kinds of literacy -- from reading novels to organizing life. How does that help her -- or hurt her -- in school? And, more generally, how do the ways with literacy that Janette has experienced at home relate to the kinds of literate behaviors expected in school?
Janette at School: Good Girl and Achiever

Literacy of Home and School: "Sort of Easy"

Janette finds little difference in the writing and reading she does at home and school. "They're both sort of easy." Writing is more similar: "I can just sit down and write." She writes in her journal or her scrapbook only at home, but makes stories in both places. The only difference is: "I don't write a wicked lot of stories at home." In school, Janette sees reading as either "independent reading or group reading," whereas at home, she reads at night or reads the news. In other words, the structures and situations for reading differ.

When Janette and I discussed the similarities and differences of home and school print literacy, Janette did not mention the incidental writing and reading she does at home and school -- lists and charts and directions. They fit into the flow of the day. But the skills built at home through such embedded use of print literacy serve Janette well in school. Charts and lists abound in the classroom: graphs and tables about favorite famous people (during the study of biographies), lists of onomatopoeia, lists of new vocabulary that has come up in discussion, the day's agenda, charts for "thinking points," "citizenship points," and "warnings." Some such items are always there and others change frequently to make room for more current lists and charts. Beth Worth feels such genre are important, simply because they are used throughout our society, and children need to be familiar with them and able to extract meaning from them (or to put meaning into those they create themselves). Beth recognizes that not all children have the same depth of experience with these uses of print as Janette does.
Each day after writing workshop and again after independent reading, Ms. Worth asks the fourth-graders to fill out their charts. These are records of the work accomplished during writing or reading time that day. Janette had no trouble understanding how to complete these charts, even on the first day. They require not only labeling (title and date and pages) but also summarizing either what you accomplished in writing or what you read. Perhaps because Janette has talked about books since her toddler years, she can easily state the main idea.

**Writing: "Like a Waterfall"**

I had quickly seen how successful a student Janette was. She liked to write, and her work was what Beth Worth called "developed." One idea led to another, points were supported, and the pieces held together. After every few sentences, Janette would stop to reread, pause to think for a moment, then continue writing. She did not do a great deal of revision on most pieces, except for the rethinking she did as she wrote her first draft. Sometimes she would turn to Penny or to another nearby friend for help with word choice, and she responded when peers asked her for advice about their writing.

Janette set high goals for herself, and she liked to do well. After she read *Indian in the Cupboard* with a small group, she wrote a summary (one of the writing options given by the teacher; another was a character sketch). Janette was pleased at the teacher's reaction. "She put A+ on it. That was my goal." I asked why she wrote a summary instead of doing one of the other options, and Janette said, "A summary was easy. I can write it wicked fast. I was gonna write five pages, but it was a summary, so I only did two. It was harder for me to do only two." Janette
wrote more and longer pieces than most of the other children. She grinned when she told me, "Miss G (the student teacher) says I write novels when I answer questions."

As part of the Native American unit, the children drew turtles to illustrate a creation story. Janette then wrote a myth of her own based on her drawing. She explained, "This story all started from a mistake I made on my turtle's leg." Here is her edited story.

A Bright Idea

Little Turtle was gifted from Magic Possum when he was born. His gift was one strong leg. That strong leg would help him swim faster so enemies would not have as likely a chance to get him. "Now, you see this turtle was very courageous," said the grandfather to his five grandchildren. The grandchildren loved to sit nice and cozy next to the fire. And the grandfather would always sit in his rocking chair telling them stories he heard when he was a lad. "Now this little turtle," said grandfather, "this little turtle was named Swiftfoot and he wanted to go to a bigger pond, so he packed his knapsack and set off. First he went to the woods to pick nuts and berries. He met a bird named nutcracker, who could get some nuts that were very delicious. Swift Foot could have never gotten those nuts for he couldn't fly or climb a tree. So he filled his knapsack even more. By now his knapsack was very full. So he kept going on his way. He started trudging through the forest. He was getting a little bored so he made up this tune. A-a-a-a-a La la la la la doodey day. And he kept singing that until he met little Mouse.

Little mouse was picking berries and invited turtle to come down into his hole. So he did. Mouse was a scavenger. So he had a lot of pieces of cloth so that night turtle stayed, had supper, and slept overnight. But while he was there he made another knapsack and stuffed his knapsack with food. The next day he said thank you and went on his way. Now he had been walking for three days and couldn't walk any further. For his magic leg was for swimming not for walking. But then he got a bright idea. If he could take a stream down to a bigger pond he did and floated right down stream to a bigger pond. And lived happily ever after."

As I had noted before, Janette knew story conventions and language. Here she framed the story as a tale told by the grandfather, a tale that he had "heard as a lad," and she did not forget to use the frame at the end as well as the beginning. She
included a simple journey, the three days so typical in folktales, a song, and the required solution which leads to a happy ending. It was a strong effort, and Janette had changed only a single word in her drafting process. Later she would tell me writing flowed easily for her, using a phrase her classmate Ryan had recently used to describe how it sometimes works for him: "It flows like a waterfall."

- Janette wrote a wide variety of genre during fourth grade:
- a paragraph about her brother
- personal narratives (about bumping her head while swimming, a bat at her birthday party)
- several folktales
- acrostic poem
- limericks
- report about Plains Indians' ways of making clothing
- animal report and poem about the animal (with Penny)
- Heritage report (research), which included interview with grandfather
- puppet show about Beauty and the Beast (with friends)
- observations (of her back yard, of chicks)
- cards
- list of things to do to cool off
- book summaries and responses
- essay about her future
- rap about respect (with friend)
- reports of classroom speakers (Bill Miller, On My Honor book talk)
Many of the genre (reports, limerick, book summaries) and some of the topics (observations, respect rap) were assigned by the teacher, while others (acrostic, report of *On My Honor*) were suggested by her, but not required. Janette seemed very comfortable with assigned topics and genres, as well as with the things she chose on her own (personal narratives and folk tales). Janette was one of the few children who preferred writing fiction.

**Happily Ever After**

Many of Janette's pieces, whether assigned or self-selected, had themes of goodness, kindness, and cooperation -- fairy tale themes. One was about an orphan, a man named Peter who fell in love with and married (on Christmas Day) a woman named Kerriane. On Christmas two years later, Peter and Kerriane give a party for the children of the orphanage. Janette's unedited first draft follows:

Peter dressed up as Santa they bought made cookies opened presents had a wonderful breakfast and a wonderful time. But Kerriane wasn't happy in a way she took Peter a side and started to weep. She then said "Peter I want to adopt these children they don't have a nice home, toys, parents but we can give them one. So they did the children were so excited and everybody live happily ever after.

In another, a "young maiden" brings food to her father, who is in jail because he could not pay his taxes "and the tax collector was not very nice." A deer named Sunshine cheers her up when she's sad, and a wounded bird that she nursed back to health comes back to see her every spring. The story continues:

One day a man came and knocked on her door. The man had been riding through the forest and wanted to know if anybody lived in the house. The man invited her back to his house. Only it wasn't a house it was a kingdom.
Wow she was impressed. He loved to hear how kind she was to animals and the brave stories of her living by herself.

Of course, the man is the prince, he asks her to marry him, and now she ("as the tax keepers boss") can have her father released from jail.

Janette was aware of the fairy tale elements in her work. Comparing her orphanage story to the turtle story ("A Bright Idea"), she explained, "The other one ["A Bright Idea"] was more like a myth. This one's more like Cinderella. The other one was more of an adventure." When I asked where she got the idea for the latter story, she shrugged and said she had no particular idea in mind. But she said, "It's almost like Cinderella. She's poor. They meet and get married, but she saves her father, though."

That final statement, "But she saves her father, though" indicates that Janette realizes she has given her heroine a slightly more active role than some fairy tales do. In both of Janette's fairy tales, the prince marries the woman, but the woman holds some power, too. In one, Kerrianne proposes adopting the children (though she does seek Peter's approval) and in the other story, the daughter (not the prince) has her father released from jail. (Of course, the character has that power because of her marriage to the prince.) Janette also has the prince recognize and approve of not only the young woman's goodness (i.e. her kindness to animals) but also her bravery. The archetypes of woman saved by heroic prince persist, but Janette has made some modern adaptations.

Goodness is a recurring theme in Janette's work. Even her description of a chick which she held and observed carries this theme.
A little black chick
I hold in my hands
So soft he is.
So gentle and kind
but wild and crazy
I rub his head
He closes his eyes
Then falls asleep.
He is so quiet he does not make a sound
nor a peep.
I then promise myself not to cry when
the time comes to say good-bye.

There is gentleness even in a creature who is also "wild and crazy." This piece also
includes the theme of separation. Janette feels strongly attached to animals as well as
people. She is learning to handle good-byes without tears.

These pieces may be providing spaces for Janette to explore some of the
themes of growing up. Her literate background gives her safe fictional frameworks
in which to explore these issues. How does a woman deal with the fairy tale myth of
the dashing prince who carries her away to "happily ever after?" How does she
handle togetherness -- is there any place for the woman to have power and strength?
And how does she deal with separation? Janette has had to deal with the latter theme
with the deaths of both her grandparents and the serious illness of a favorite uncle.
As noted earlier, she has written about her grandmother's death several times, both at
home and at school. Janette finds school, as well as home, accommodating places for
her to express her feelings in writing.

The themes that Janette is exploring -- goodness, togetherness, separation --
bring to mind the research findings of Carol Gilligan. Gilligan found that
preadolescent girls (around ages 11 and 12) begin to suppress many of their feelings — feelings which they had been willing to express in their childhood years. Gilligan thinks that society gives the message to girls that their feelings are not important, that they should not feel negative or sad feelings and should hide them if they do. This is a message that boys receive at an even earlier age. Young boys and adolescent girls are expected to become independent people, yet they wish to stay in relationship with others.

The relational crisis of boys' early childhood and of girls' adolescence is marked by a struggle to stay in relationship — a healthy resistance to disconnections which are psychologically wounding (from the body, from feelings, from relationships, from reality). This struggle takes a variety of forms, but at its center is a resistance to loss -- to giving up the reality of relationships for idealizations or, as it is sometimes called, identifications. As a young boy often takes on images of heroes, or superheroes, as the grail which informs his quest to inherit his birthright or his manhood, so girls are pressed at adolescence to take on images of perfection as the model of the pure or perfectly good woman: the woman whom everyone values and wants to be with." (in press, 23)

Adolescent girls are pressured to suppress what they know about real relationships and to replace them with idealized ones; resistance to this (and learning instead to accept and deal with conflict) can be psychologically healthy.

Gilligan writes:

For girls to remain responsive to themselves, they must resist the conventions of feminine goodness; to remain responsive to others, they must resist the values placed on self-sufficiency and independence in North American culture. Thus for girls to develop a clear sense of self in relationship with others means -- at least within the mainstream of North American culture -- to take on the problem of resistance and also to take up the question of what relationship means to themselves, to others, and to the world. (1990, 10)

Janette is not yet an adolescent and has not yet faced the identity crisis many teenagers face, but as a sensitive, empathetic child she is already sensing some of the
contradictions young women confront. Having been brought up to think for herself and state her opinions at home, she has, on the other hand, felt society's message to be submissive and "good." She toys with these issues in her fiction writing, trying to accommodate both images of goodness and of active women with power.

Perhaps these conflicts also affect Janette in class. Even as she likes to achieve, Janette knows that according to society's definitions, girls are good, nice—and quiet. Related to these struggles are issues of authority.

**Authority vs. Ownership**

In the spring, Janette and Penny wrote a poem about manatees, as part of their study of the animals. They shared it during sharing time, and Beth Worth asked them to reread it. "This has *loads* of information in it, she said. After the second reading, she observed, "You probably want to work with the rhythm there at the end..."

Janette nodded and sat down.

When sharing time was over, the girls went back to working on their poem. Janette reread it, then said to her partner, "She says we have to rhyme in the end. I don't want to. That's the ending, you can't write another sentence." Penny agreed, and they continued to talk about what they perceived as a dilemma: that their teacher suggested they rework the rhyme and rhythm, but that they were happy with the ending as it stood. I knew Beth had meant her comment as a suggestion, not a directive (and that she had not mentioned the rhyme, in any case), but that was the way the girls read her reaction.

I asked Janette and Penny why they liked the poem as it was, and they had trouble articulating their reasons. Janette kept saying, "There's no rhyme for 'extinct.'
We don't want to change it anyway, but even if we did, there's nothing that rhymes with 'extinct.' She said several times that she liked the last sentence or statement, and "That's the way it ends." When I pushed for clarification, she told me, "It's like a poster." To her, the final line was a statement of the message, the concluding point, almost like a slogan on a poster. To try to rhyme it or tamper with the rhythm would lessen the statement the girls felt they had already made quite effectively.

Even though their teacher had not given them a directive, they did not feel comfortable challenging her authority. On the one hand, they wanted to do what they thought would please her, while on the other hand, they strongly liked what they had done. Instead of confronting the authority directly, they quietly let the poem stand, but they did not bring it again to the attention of the teacher. This conflict between a desire to please vs. one's own wishes reminded me of the day Janette agreed to see me, even though she confessed to her mother that it was "aggravating."

It was hard to disappoint an adult authority figure (in this case, me) so Janette agreed to be with me even though she didn't want to. She was close enough to her mother to admit her real feelings to her, and when I heard of them, I respected them and did not visit that day. Still, I regretted Janette had not felt comfortable telling me no. In the tension between her own feelings and society's definitions of a nice girl, she had opted for social norms. Even with a strong, supportive mother, Janette finds those cultural messages hard to resist.

**Achieving and Competing**

At the beginning of January, Ms. Worth asked the children to list their main accomplishments of the previous year and to set goals for the new one. Most of the
accomplishments Janette recorded had to do with reading and writing. See Figure 4-3 on the next page.

Janette's goals were a combination of school-related plans and interpersonal, helping kinds of goals, mostly involving her brother. See Figure 4-4 on page 148.

Janette likes music and art, but they do not show up on either list. She does indicate her interest in sports, listing swimming and soccer accomplishments. But print literacy -- and people -- come first with Janette.

Janette has drive and an interest in achieving. She is proud of reading the most books; she works hard at sports. She approaches new tasks with confidence and persistence. Donna talked about Janette's success at playing the clarinet. "She's really good at clarinet. she really took to it -- picked it up quickly. She always practiced herself. Never, not once, have I told her to practice. She just goes in her room and does it." Donna tied this to Janette's interest in achieving:

She has a lot of discipline. She sticks to it. She enjoys it so she sticks to it. The drive she has. I'm truly in awe of this drive. It seems anything she puts her mind to, she excels at it...Hard work will produce the results. Not exactly hard work, but the repetition of it, keeping at it...In soccer, too, the skills have come together. She doesn't just do it halfway. I hope she does well. I know she'll do well.
My Main Accomplishments in 1991

1. I have read the most mass books in the class.
2. I got lots of penpals in Australia and other places.
4. I made it in swimming to shark class.
5. I worked hard at soccer practices.
6. I did good on spelling and math tests.
7. I learned long division.
8. I started writing acenter.
9. I did a Beauty and the Beast play and did good puppets.

Figure 4-3 Janette's Accomplishments
Happy New Year!

Resolutions

1. To write more... (At home, at school)
2. Clean my desk whenever it gets messy.
3. Read at least eight of the mass books before February.
4. To let my cat out when I am asked to.
5. Be nicer to my brother.
6. Help my brother on his homework more often.

Figure 4-4 Janette's Resolutions
Janette was unafraid of trying new things, and Beth Worth pushed her to do so, particularly new kinds of writing. The research report was the newest and most challenging genre for Janette. She worked with Sandy and a student from the college to research France.

The girls had little trouble using reference books to find information. They were familiar with tables of contents and indices, and they knew how to use charts and captions to help them find what they needed. But Janette's report was dry and academic. Beth Worth said it was "bookish" and she wished there were more of Janette's voice in it. The problem was one that's common to children just learning to research: the report was paraphrased from the texts Janette had used. Though full of information, the report also jumped around some from topic to topic.

Beth showed Janette how to underline sentences in different colors to identify sentences on similar topics and rearrange them. Janette revised this paper several times, rearranging information. After a conference with Beth, she wrote new leads for different sections of the report. In the first draft, she had written, "Paris, the capital of France, is the leader in all intellectual pursuits has the largest concentration of museums and libraries. Her new lead was: Paris is very famous for its museums, cathedrals, and libraries."

More interesting to me than the writing process Janette underwent was the drive she showed in completing the report. She had made a bet with David that she could do "more pages than you." They made the bet when she was just starting the first page of notes, but Janette told me proudly, "I did get ahead of him." She told Penny, "I need more information. I'm going through every book I find." She worked
on the weekend. She said she worked at her desk with the door closed "so it isn't noisy. I ate lunch there [at the desk]. I sat there about an hour." "You're gonna be a writer," Penny declared.

I suspect Janette would have pushed herself even without the bet with David, but it intrigued me that she set up that competition. Many studies show that older girls slacken in achievement compared to boys (Bailey, 1992), but Janette is setting up her own competition with the highest achieving boy in the class. Though he shines in class discussions, she is unafraid to compete with him on her terms. Janette shows her drive and achievement more quietly than David does, but she still shows it.

**Leadership through Cooperation**

Though Janette stays in the background in the large group, she works well with others in small groups and partnerships. She is skilled not only in reading and writing. She's also a good listener, and in a partnership or small group, she's able to state her opinion and to negotiate readily with others. Perhaps that format is more comfortable for her because it is more relational than a whole class setting -- you work face to face with others. It's more akin to the relationships Janette knows from home and neighborhood; it's less formal and institutional.

One day, Janette and Sandy worked together to write about a police officer's visit to their class. The policeman gave a book talk about *On My Honor*, a book in which a boy drowns after he and his friend disobey their parents and go to a forbidden area. The friend, afraid to admit what has happened, lies to his parents about it.
As Janette and Sandy worked, they negotiated what to write. As I listened, I was impressed with how well the girls cooperated with each other. Later, as I reread the transcript of the taped conversation, I was surprised to realize that Janette had made almost all of the writing decisions. Sandy turned to her for confirmation of her ideas, and while Sandy sometimes became silly or made comments about other things (for example, "We have gym in fifteen minutes") or made statements about personal connections with the subject matter ("I usually don't lie"), Janette remained focused on the task. Here is an excerpt of their conversation. Each child was writing the same words on separate papers.

Janette: (listing the characters in the book) Mr. and Mrs. Zarinski, Tony's parents, Joel's little four year old brother, boy, and girl, and his friend. You got that? (pause).

Sandy: Okay.

Janette: Now it's your turn. I just did that sentence.

Sandy: Oh. Switch. Okay. What should we call it? Should we put in the book says lying. It's lying?

Janette: In the book. How about, the police officer talked a lot about like, lying, the truth...?

Sandy: Well, how about if we put, in the book instead of going to the park, they went swimming, and like, I think he said Joel or something...? Yeah, Joel...like drowned or something, and, like, the boy helped him or something.

Janette: I don't know. We really didn't understand that, so we should put something else, like what the policeman talked about.

Sandy: Okay. The policeman said, the policeman talked about lying.

Janette: Okay, the policeman talked about lying.

Sandy: You shouldn't lie? (laughs) Everybody knows you shouldn't lie! I usually don't lie. My sister's the one.

Janette: The character in the book like bended the truth, do you think?
Sandy: A character in [another book -- garbled on tape]...What are you writing?

Janette: A character bended the truth a little.

Sandy: Bended?

Janette (erasing and fixing the word): Bent.

In this interchange, the girls took turns speaking, either proposing words or reacting to the other's suggestions. Neither one dominated the conversation, though in the longer tape, it's clearer that Janette made more of the writing decisions. They dialogue gracefully. They check ideas with each other ("Do you think?" "What should we call it -- lying?"). They pause so the other one can finish writing. Janette did not accept Sandy's attempt at summarizing the book, because the girls had not really understood that. She did not want to present information about something she did not know, so she suggested they stay with the safer topic of the police officer's talk itself. Sandy accepted Janette's decision about that, just as Janette calmly corrected "bended" without defensiveness. The cooperativeness of the girls is evident in the number of times they used the word "okay" in this short segment of conversation.

It's interesting that Janette preferred to say the character "bent the truth," rather than that he lied. I speculate that it sounded better to her because it is less "bad." Again, it seems to fit the theme of niceness that comes up so often with her.

Another time, I asked Janette to explain to me how she and Penny wrote poems together. She said, "We take turns. I write one line, she writes one line." I asked if they keep their lines separate or if they give ideas to each other as they work, and they said they do break in and help each other. Suddenly Janette became much
more animated and said, "Like Penny will think of a word. She's so good at thinking of the right word. She'll find something to rhyme if we need it. She's wicked good at it."

Janette often showed such appreciation for other's strengths. At my house, Janette exclaimed over my son's artwork on the refrigerator, and she also complimented her brother on his. Though she was quiet in the large group sharing times, she was sometimes the first to lead the applause for someone else's work. This cooperative attitude is as valuable a skill in school as her print literacy. Particularly in a classroom like Beth Worth's, which has a highly cooperative and interactive culture, Janette's skills at working with others were useful and valued.

Janette's appreciation of others and her belief in fairness made her a good leader in small groups. For Field Day at the end of the year, about eight of the girls were preparing a dance. Two of the girls were having a hard time learning the steps, and a couple of the others wanted to throw them out of the group. As Beth said, "They were just dealing with the dancing. But Janette and one of the other girls were trying to keep everybody equal and dancing. They worked with the girls who were having trouble."

The times that Janette was most animated in school were in small groups that were the most like home: when the children played games during a rainy recess, on "games Day," or on Halloween afternoon. While it's to be expected that children would be more animated in such play than during "work" time, the contrast in Janette was striking and more pronounced than with most of the other children.
On Halloween, Janette and a group of friends had decided to play a children's version of Trivial Pursuit. In this small group, Janette did not gain her authority in her usual way -- by being a good listener, interpreter, and supporter. This time, she actively took charge. "Michaela and I are captains, okay?" she announced. (She still kept that phrase -- okay? -- to include others in the decision. It was not then exactly a directive!) Someone said, "Miss G will play, but we need one more." Janette called across the room, "David! Urkle! (He was in costume as a television character, Steve Urkle.) (This was the only time I ever saw her shout across the room.)

David joined the group, and said of the game, "I play with my parents. I always get the right number." Janette was not to be outdone: "Me, too. I roll [the dice] for them." As the game proceeded, Janette continued to be in charge, reading the clues to the other team. David, the most effective speaker in class discussions, was on equal footing with her here. (He read questions to the other group.)

In a situation more like home -- playing games rather than writing stories or doing math sheets -- Janette's behavior became more exuberant, assertive, and it even became louder! Adept at reading her culture and knowing the limits of acceptable behavior, Janette showed more of her at-home personality in a more home-like situation. She knows which conventions are acceptable at which times and adapts herself to situations and their constraints.

Beth Worth tried to counteract the pressures which influence Janette and other achieving girls to remain quiet. Knowing and appreciating Janette's ability, Beth Worth tried to give her opportunities to lead in small groups and to perform before the whole class. Once, a group of boys were preparing a skit, and they needed a girl
to take on one of the major roles. Beth asked for volunteers. One or two raised their hands immediately, but Beth waited several seconds until finally Janette raised her hand. Beth called on her. She said, "Janette is so quiet. I want her to have the chance to stretch and express herself -- to take that challenge. And she did!"

Beth also encouraged Janette to take part more actively in large group discussions. When she met the Dumonts for a parent/student/teacher conference at the end of first semester, Beth suggested that Janette might set a goal to participate more vocally in class, and Janette agreed. When the Dumonts came for a conference at the end of second term, Janette and Ms. Worth agreed that Janette was answering more in class, and they expanded the goal for the next term to include sharing more stories with the group. Though the other children knew Janette as a strong writer (in fact, of all the children she had the most pieces printed in the class anthology which was compiled in December), she seldom shared them orally unless requested. As comfortable as Janette was with reading and writing, she was not as comfortable showing off her knowledge. Luckily, in this classroom, she could shine and show her leadership -- as well as her knowledge -- in other ways.

**The Flip Sides of Achievement and Sensitivity**

While school is easy for a child like Janette, whose home literacies match so well with the literacies of school, there are a couple of less positive side affects to consider. The first is the pressure to perform, to be right, to continue to stay on top. Donna wonders if Janette chooses not to speak unless she's absolutely sure she's right. The Dumonts worry that their daughter is too serious and perhaps too eager to be perfect. They try to counter those tendencies, lightheartedly teasing when she gets an
A- in an effort to let her know she doesn't always need A's and A+'s. Donna says

Janette sets extremely high expectations for herself. She and Art want to lessen that

pressure. But she says:

I do think we expect a lot. Art expects a lot. Even when she was little, it was
like he was never content with what she was doing. Like coloring, that's
probably a silly example, but he'd show her how to add more or say, 'Try to
stay in the lines.' I'd say, "Just let her play." That's how he approaches both
our kids. In some cases, he's correct. In others, I feel it's not that important.
Just let it go...They have been given the message that they can do better. I
wonder if we do put too much pressure.

But Donna also considers another possibility. Remembering her own
experience in school -- her hurt when someone called her an "egghead" and her
feeling that she should apologize for her love of learning, Donna wonders: Is Janette
facing some of those issues now?

I think she is. And I think Janette's strength at interpersonal relationships has
a side effect: she is sensitive not only to other's feelings, but to society's expectations
for girls to be quiet and nice, especially in formal settings beyond the home.

Donna Dumont is aware that her behavior sends messages, and she tries to
support her children's feelings, encouraging them to take risks and to feel proud of
their accomplishments and knowledge. She also tries to set an example of an active
woman who does not buy into society's stereotypes. She told me about a day when
high waters flooded the yards near the Dumont's home. Janette and John and Penny
found that lots of earthworms had come to the surface, and they started scooping
them up in their hands and moving them to save them from the water. Donna stood
and watched, until suddenly she said to herself, "What am I doing here just

watching?" and joined in. A nurturing mother, Donna also wanted to be seen as
willing to get her hands dirty, to plunge in actively at an unpleasant task. She also speaks her mind (albeit gently and gracefully), and she and her husband encourage Janette to speak her opinion.

Once when Donna and I were talking, wondering how society's messages about not displaying intelligence may have affected Janette, Donna said:

I had a college roommate who just wanted to get married. That's why she came to school, to meet a husband. I didn't look at it that way. I came from a big family, and I saw what it was like, and I didn't think getting married was all that glamorous. I thought it would be nice to be married someday, but not that that was all to my life. I remember [my roommate] saying that she felt sorry for me that I didn't believe in a Prince Charming. At the time, I thought there was something wrong with me. I really did. I didn't get married until later, didn't have my first child until I was thirty. I wouldn't do it any differently, either.

Here's an example of what Gilligan talked about: the pressure on young women to accept idealized relationships instead of the relationships one knows are true.

Because Donna didn't succumb to the myth of the prince charming, she thought there was something wrong with her. She does not want her daughter to have that experience. Janette and other girls need to be encouraged to have confidence in their voices and their truths -- and to express them. This will be even more crucial for Janette as she enters adolescence.

A "Natural" Student?

Donna and Art are pleased that Janette is such a reader and is so happy in school. At a parent/teacher/student conference, Donna sometimes shakes her head in amazement at Janette's accomplishments. Once, Beth referred to an extended project as "the kind of work they'd do in a Talented and Gifted program." Donna confessed to me later," If anything, Art and I don't realize how bright she is. We don't tend to
think of her as a T.A.G. child. She's always done well. We just expect it. She's a natural student."

But of course, there's more to it than that. Janette's success is not simply "natural." It began many years ago. When she sat in her mother's lap looking at picture books, when her father carried on elaborate conversations with her as she toddled after him in the garden, when she scribbled on a clipboard as Donna wrote her grocery list, Janette was serving an apprenticeship as a language-user and a user of print. Her parents exposed her to the world of print by their modeling and by their inviting her to participate. Wells (1986) found that the single thing that most correlated with later success in school was being read to. Exposure to books was not enough; interacting with an adult as they read together appeared to make the difference. Many studies have noted this connection between early reading and later school success. And Janette has seen print working in her household in many ways besides stories -- lists and memos on the refrigerator and the bulletin board, magazines and encyclopedias in the living room, newspapers and mail on the kitchen table.

By the very nature of their lives, Janette's parents have demonstrated a variety of ways to use reading and writing and to get meaning from print. Janette has been asked to contribute and justify her opinions, and to participate in other aspects of family life which have prepared her to learn well in school. Though Art and Donna live their lives as they do because of personal values rather than for a conscious plan to prepare their children for schooling, the kinds of experiences they have provided have given Janette and John firm foundations for school learning. Donna and Art
have done this not only by their personal demonstrations of ways to read and write, and not only by their reading and writing with their child, but by providing tools and experiences which have led her to a "way of being in the world" which is compatible with the expectations held by schools as institutions of mainstream culture.

**Tools for Learning**

Tools come in several varieties. Vera John Steiner (1985) has documented the importance of tools to creative individuals in many fields -- art, music, science, mathematics. Tools may be actual objects -- the paper and markers, crayons and sketch pads, books and other information. Donna and Art clearly provided Janette with these kinds of tools for literacy. Donna spoke of her effort to buy many books by going to yard sales and of regular trips to the library. Janette has various crayons, markers, and art supplies stored in her desk and in her bedroom. But tools can also mean the thinking skills that underlie a particular discipline, and Janette has had experience with those tools, too. When her parents expected her to state her opinion and support it with reasons, when she was asked to explain her feelings, she was calling upon expressive tools.

Janette's family has exposed her to a range of experiences which provide her with background knowledge that supports the kinds of learning expected in school. Janette's regular activities include softball or soccer (depending on the season), Campfire Girls, church school, and occasional after-school clubs. She has taken swimming lessons, and she makes frequent trips to the library. Most weekends find the Dumonts involved in some sort of family activity -- yard work, visits with relatives, ice skating, or trips to museums. Art is an active supporter of
environmental causes and sometimes brings the children to presentations or on outdoor walks. The Dumonts recently invested in a family membership to the science museum in the city and they make frequent excursions there.

I asked Janette if she would let me read and photocopy a few entries from her journal; she offered the first page (January 1-3) and entries from the last three days of February and the first three days of March. In those nine days, she wrote briefly about the following experiences:

a trip to the city for a New Year's Eve family celebration which the Dumonts attend most years (she mentioned a magic show)

a visit to the library

attendance at her friend's soccer clinic

participation in an after-school crafts program

two visits from relatives

an evening at an informal restaurant in honor of her birthday

an excursion to a local farm and another farm where the Dumonts lived when Janette was a baby

visits to two local historic attractions

Perhaps these two series of days were unusually busy, but Janette's diary entries show the variety of activities and experiences which her family routinely provides. All of them give her world knowledge which can be useful to her as a reader and learner in school. More than content, some of the experiences provide her with practice in meaning-making of the sort schools require. At a historic home, for example, Janette wrote that "we had a tour and went to hearth cooking." In such a
situation, she would get information by listening to an authority, similar to the kind of presentation common in school (See Cazden 1988).

Exposure to a wide range of mainstream cultural experiences helps give Janette information and world knowledge which relates well to social studies and other school curricula. It also gives her practice in the kinds of learning valued in school. Sometimes consciously and often unconsciously, Janette's parents, by living according to their values, have given Janette experiential and thinking tools for school learning just as surely as they have provided her with sketchpads and pencils to encourage her interest in drawing.

Janette's Future

In the spring, Janette wrote about her future in a piece that reflected themes that she has visited before -- themes of caring. She wrote, "Now I think I'll be a teacher a Marine biologist or a nurse." Choosing the latter, she discussed the kinds of animals she would help and some things she would learn. Here is her essay.

My Future

In the future I will probably have brown hair and still blue eyes but this will be my day. I will get up in the morning. Now I think I'll be a teacher, a marine biologist or a nurse. Let's say I was a marine biologist. I would go explore the seashore. Of course I will also study things deeper in the ocean like dolphins and sea lions and lots of other things. I will work to help save animals, and I will help orphan babies when they have no mother. I will work at a zoo or aquarium probably. I will learn lots, like some fish have special colors to blend in with the background so other fish can't eat them. Lobsters, crabs and other kinds of marine life sometimes shed their shells. So before they shed their shell it's very soft. Well, by the time I get old enough to work as a marine biologist some animals might be extinct. But I will still help the animals that are alive and that will be my job and my future.
Janette thought about future careers at other times. After she read a biography of Marie Curie, she and I had a discussion about it, in which she indicated she'd like to be a pediatrician. "But my mother says I won't be a very good doctor if I can't stand the sight of blood." In the journal introduction to her *American Girls* journal, she wrote again that she wants to "be good worker and work with animals or be a doctor maybe a teacher," all caring professions. Her mother has made another suggestion. "My mother says I'd make a good lawyer 'cause I fight back and I always have a good argument."

Janette has also considered being a writer. I asked her once why she likes books so much and she said, "I like the stories. I like how the writers get into the book so much, then you want to get into it even more...I've liked all the books I read so far. I've never really not liked a book. I mean, you think, like writing little stories and when you grow up they could be published!" I asked if she'd like to write books some day. "Yeah, I've thought about that a lot," she said.

Janette sees herself as a reader and a writer and a nurturer. Her print literacy -- and her interpersonal, cooperative literacies -- may have been refined at school, but they were acquired at home. Her home literacies match well with the literacies of school and the literacies expected for success in mainstream society. Educators understand and readily support them.

Influenced not only by mainstream print literacy, Janette is also influenced by conventional gender messages. She feels society's pressure to be a good girl, and in school (even if not in her particular fourth grade classroom), good means quiet. Luckily, Janette's classroom offers many opportunities to interact in small groups or
one-to-one, as well as in large class settings. Those interactions allow Janette to
practice her leadership skills, which are based on her relational strengths.

With parents who encourage achievement and a teacher who tries to develop
her leadership, Janette is doing well. She will need their support as she faces the
conflicts common to adolescent girls. But her print and interactive literacies are
strong, and the path to her future looks promising.
CHAPTER FIVE

ERIC: SHOW, DON'T TELL

Just One of the Crowd

Eric hardly appeared in my field notes the first few weeks of school. Often described by adults as "shy," he almost never raised his hand to contribute to class discussion, and even in small teacher-led groups, he contributed only when asked to. Quiet and cooperative, he easily slipped into the background. At ten, he was one of the tallest in the class, and he looked to me like a small version of a professional football player -- rugged, solid, strong. His dark hair was cut close to his head in a modified crewcut, a style popular with many of the boys. His usual outfit -- clean blue jeans, a sweatshirt or tee shirt, and high top athletic shoes -- resembled the "uniform" of most of the other children. Eric was friends with the others, especially the boys, and actively joined in recess games. But with his soft voice and accommodating style, he went along rather than asserting his views of how things ought to be done. One of the gang, Eric not only did not claim the limelight, but actively avoided it.

Four days a week, Eric and Carlos left the room soon after their arrival to spend a half hour in the Resource Room for reading help, along with a third boy from another class. Back in Ms. Worth's room, Eric would take his seat, find out what he
was supposed to be doing from another student or from the teacher, and join in -- to
different degrees, depending on the activity. Usually at that time in the morning, the
class was holding a writing workshop.

Language activities were not easy for Eric. As Beth Worth put it, "Spelling
is one of Eric's challenges." His first drafts were sometimes hard to read as a result.
Like the other children, his first piece of the year was "About the Author," a piece
about himself to go into his book of finished writings, which Ms. Worth called the
Best Books. Then he wrote a short piece about his family, then another assigned
piece about a guest speaker, Bill Miller. Figure 5-1 (on page 168) shows his Writing
Workshop record sheet from the first few weeks of school.

Eric had great trouble spelling multi-syllable words, (fanst and fanshet for
finished, faley and fanley for family, spsis for spaces, sarrt for started, strer for story,
tmory for tomorrow) -- spelling more typical of a younger child. He had trouble with
blends and vowels, sometimes omitting them, sometimes transposing the letters,
sometimes using the wrong ones. Yet he used the five minutes Ms. Worth provided
at the end of writing workshop, completing the chart correctly with "Piece I Worked
On," "What I Got Done and How It Went." After the first few days, however, he
became careless about including the date.

When he wrote, Eric concentrated for a few sentences, printing the words
somewhat haphazardly, then he'd converse with a friend or play with his pencil for a
few minutes, then he'd work again for a short time. He concentrated better when he
worked at the computer. I sat beside him as he typed his Bill Miller piece, already
edited by the teacher, into the computer. It was a word-by-word process. Eric would
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Piece I Worked On</th>
<th>What I Got Done &amp; How It Went</th>
<th>Editor's Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/6</td>
<td>About the Author</td>
<td>Finished 1D Conf. MS W worked on an agraps 1/2 offed</td>
<td>Some good ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/9</td>
<td>About the Author</td>
<td>P.D. will be done tomorrow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/10</td>
<td>About the other</td>
<td>Fast P.D. new story tomorrow</td>
<td>See me for correcting of sp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/11</td>
<td>About the other</td>
<td>New story; my fakey, get fast ready to testate.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>my fakey</td>
<td>Fast P.D. to day should correcting spelling</td>
<td>Get quick word handbook &amp; check sp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>my fakey</td>
<td>Fanishet story start a rather later timly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/20</td>
<td>Bill/en Bill</td>
<td>Note Bill miller</td>
<td>Be sure of date! Some good work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bill miller</td>
<td>Com peten I got up to line 5: 48 spis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bill miller</td>
<td>Com peten prart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5-1  Eric's Writing Record
look at the edited paper, hunt for the letters on the keyboard as he whispered them to himself, then type them in, looking for them to appear on the computer screen. Constantly shifting his gaze from paper to keyboard to monitor was laborious, but Eric seemed quite comfortable with this phase of the writing. He frequently reread what he had typed and willingly made small revisions, which he overlooked or even resisted on longhand papers. He sometimes turned to me for spelling help, and I deflected his questions back to him.

Eric: How do you spell "clothes?"
MV: How much do you know of it?
Eric: C-l-o.
MV: Yes. Then t-h.
Eric: t-h?
MV: (nods)
Eric: e-s?
MV: (nods)

Eric often looked to adults for help. He would have trouble understanding a math problem and bring it to the student teacher, or he'd stand patiently at Ms. Worth's desk as she conferred with someone else, waiting to ask a question about directions. This seemed partly due to lack of self-confidence; Beth Worth commented that "Eric is more blocked than he needs to be." His search for adult reassurance also indicated that he wanted to do well.

As Eric finished typing the Bill Miller piece, he asked me, "Are there any mistakes?" I suggested he read it and see if he found any. "I won't," he said. But he
found a place where he needed to add a space and he capitalized the S on State College. He asked how to spell "college" and I referred him to the paper his teacher had edited. He used it to make the correction. I helped him identify and fix a punctuation error and a couple of misspellings. On his own, Eric changed a pronoun to a name (evidence that he was reading the piece not only for sense but for clarity). Then he added another short sentence at the end of the piece. Those were the first times I ever saw him revise on his own. His finished piece read as follows.

Bill Miller

Bill Miller is 36 years old. He is a Indian. So is his father. I learned a lot from him. I got to hold a lot of his things. He has 3 kids and a wife. I got to play the drums. It was fun. I did not go to his concert last night. It was at the ... State College. I wanted to go but we did not have enough time. My teacher went. Her name is Ms. Worth. She is nice. Bill Miller likes braids. I put a necklace on. It adjusts to any size. I adjusted it my size. He showed us Indian clothes. He had a flute. It has a duck on it.

I knew Eric felt good about the finished piece, and I knew we had had a successful interaction. I had seen first hand how hard Eric worked to control print, and I saw some of the strategies he could use (rereading) and some of the areas that gave him trouble, especially spelling. But what did it mean in terms of his overall literacy? I wasn't sure. I started to pay more attention to Eric to see what else I could learn about him.

By the time October arrived, the writing workshop was in full swing and Eric chose his own topics. At first, he went to the teacher for help; she talked to him about his interests and together they devised a topic list, which she recorded for him. Once he had the list, Eric seldom wasted time finding a topic. He would work on a
piece in spurts of activity, then lean back in his chair and pause for awhile. He wrote pieces about his aunt's pool, his dirt bike, and fast cars.

Once in a while, if I were near Eric's desk during independent reading time, he'd call me over to point out a picture in the book he was reading about cars. "Look at this one," he'd say, pointing. "Do you think this has gas or remote control?" I had no idea how to tell, so I'd guess. Eric would chuckle when I got it wrong. Eventually, he showed me how to tell the difference -- the remote control one has an extra antenna.

I noticed that, quiet as he was, Eric almost always had something in his hands. During class or group discussions, he'd quietly pull on a rubber band or tap a pencil against his knee or flip an eraser over and over in his palm. He was unobtrusive about it, though, and I suspected he didn't even realize his hands were always busy.

When I arrived at school in the morning, Eric would often wander over to check out my tape recorder or camera and sometimes to offer me a bit of information. "I'm gonna help my father move a house Sund'y," he announced one day, and in answer to my questions, explained that his dad's job involved driving the truck on which the house would be loaded. Sometimes Eric would tell me very brief stories about events in New Hampshire, where he and his family spent most weekends with extended family. He'd mention the various vehicles he, his father, and his uncles owned -- dirt bikes and snowmobiles and tractors. Once he told me, "I have three tree houses up there. Well, really two. One is way back in the woods." I could never get much more information out of him than what he offered. He'd answer my
questions with single words or would shrug and go back to his schoolwork. But it was clear that he loved going to New Hampshire.

I became more and more intrigued with Eric. He obviously had some stories to tell, but he was comfortable mentioning just their barest outlines orally or in writing. And he clearly had difficulty reading as well as writing. Was he "learning disabled," as the records claimed, or did he have a different way of learning and showing what he knew? With his unobtrusive behavior, his tendency to conform and go along, he was the kind of child who can sometimes "slip through the cracks." I knew I did not know much about children like Eric, who are less verbocentric than most, and I wanted to find out what made him tick. I decided to contact his family.

**Eric at Home**

**The Eldredge Home**

I was encouraged by Eric's mother's reaction when I called to discuss the possibility of choosing Eric as a case study. Denise Eldredge speaks with energy; she reacted enthusiastically to my call. "Sure! Anything that helps Eric in school, I'm interested in." We agreed I would come talk to her after school to further explain my project and would meet her husband Russell later.

The Eldredge house sits squarely on a corner at the top of a small but sharp rise. There are perhaps five or six houses clinging to the lower hill. A main road intersects at the bottom, linking residents to fast food stores and the college to the east, downtown businesses to the west, and forming a buffer between them and the railroad tracks. White with black shutters at the windows, the three-family house has porches at both front and back, and a narrow strip of yard, hardly wider than a
sidewalk, along the back. I noticed that the first floor front porch was decorated with pots of hanging silk flowers. Eric called to me from the back steps: "Come in this way." A fabric Halloween witch danced against the door panel as Denise Eldredge swung the door open.

Denise Eldredge was as personable face to face as she had been on the phone. She welcomed me with a shy grin. An attractive woman in her early thirties, she's of medium height, though she always seems petite to me. Perhaps it's because of her perkiness. Her dark hair is clipped short, reminding me of the pixie haircuts which were in style when I was young.

As Eric helped himself to a frozen waffle, Denise offered me a cool drink and a seat at the kitchen table. It was a pleasant kitchen, and immaculate. There was a Boston rocker in the corner and several attractive handcrafted items around the room. I noticed a wooden clock decorated with pressed flowers. The refrigerator, next to the stove on the inner wall, held a single news clipping of the school lunch menu. On another visit, I saw a poem about friendship Denise's sister-in-law had given her, but usually the refrigerator face was clear. Even the small sewing table near the entrance to the living room was neat, with the sewing basket stored underneath. On one wall a small wooden container held a few envelopes. Occasionally, the daily local paper was on the rocker or the sideboard, and once a birthday card was displayed. On one or two visits Denise apologized for the dishes in the sink, which I never noticed, for the sink, along with the cabinets, was located in a long pantry off the main body of the kitchen. I also did not usually see the calendar, which was mounted on a doorway around the corner from the kitchen, in a little hallway. But I knew the calendar was
there, because Denise sometimes referred to it when we planned our next time to get together, and once she showed it to me. Notations were in her handwriting -- a few medical appointments and school events, along with notes about coupon offers Denise had sent for on particular dates. She told me Eric read it sometimes. "He must. He knew about his dentist appointment."

From the kitchen table, I could see the entrances to the other rooms -- three bedrooms and the living room. A large entertainment center dominated one wall of the living room; on it were a television, stereo, VCR, and a few books which belong to Denise. Later in the year, there would also be a Nintendo game. In one corner of the room was the built-in corner cupboard expected in homes of this era, and in another corner was a small aquarium with "only three fish left." Like the kitchen, the living room boasted some lovely crafted items -- Denise and Russell's wedding invitation, decorated with pressed flowers, and a hand-embroidered family tree, as well as plants and family photographs. When I admired a framed portrait of Eric and his sister Nicole, Eric asserted, "I hate that picture." Nicole concurred.

The most striking thing about the living room was a stenciled border which started at chair-rail height but wound its way up around the windows, like a vine. Denise had done the stencilling herself. She said, "My sister kind of told me [how], but not really. I marked it off on the wall. I measured using the yardstick and a pencil. You can erase with alcohol and cue tips. It took me a while -- the stencil is in two or three parts." She said, "I wanted to do it like a chair rail, but then it didn't look right at the end of the room, so I asked my niece, 'Should I do it?' and she said I
should, so I brought it up around the windows. There are a lot of mistakes in it, though." I couldn’t see any. Denise told me the corners have gaps in them.

**Denise Eldredge: Keeping Organized**

On most of my visits to the Eldredge home, Denise and I would sit at the table and talk over ginger ale or ice water dispensed from a bottle in the frig. Often those visits, like the first one, occurred after school while Eric and his sister wandered in and out, and I’d sometimes follow Eric into his room or outside to see what he was playing. At other times, Denise and I would chat about Christmas shopping, local news, and, of course, Eric. A few times Denise and I met when the children weren’t around, on Friday mornings, her day off. She works the other four weekday mornings in a lawyer’s office, typing, filing, and generally "keeping my boss organized." Judging from the well-kept apartment, Denise is a good organizer.

Denise grew up in this house. Even now it belongs to her mother, who lives upstairs. Her brother has an apartment on the third floor. She has fond memories of playing in the neighborhood: relieve-y-o; kick-the-can, jumprope, marbles, and jacks. She commented that her kids today don’t do all that: "some hide and seek, but they mostly ride their bikes a lot."

Like many in her generation in Newbridge, Denise went to parochial school. She thinks the main difference between Catholic school and public school is the discipline. Both schools may have some kids who are "not nice," but the nuns keep them "under their thumb." She laughed as she said that if her kids went to Catholic school, "Nicole wouldn't have a wardrobe problem!" But Denise likes Lincoln School. Eric has not had a teacher he disliked. Denise thinks the school is good.
because of its association with the college. They have student teachers and "up and coming things" like computers, which are good for kids to learn. Denise doesn't think the curriculum itself is very different from the parochial school curriculum.

Many afternoons as Denise and I sat and talked, the two children and their friends came in and out. On several occasions, Eric came in looking for something -- his cap gun or water bottle or chalk-- and each time his mother told him exactly where to find it. She is the organizer of the home. That role includes responsibility for record-keeping and bills-paying. Once she showed me the drawer in the side-board in which she keeps some ordinary household supplies. Figure 5-2 (on the next page) shows the things included there and her comments on them.

Though there is little print visible around the house, Denise Eldredge reads and writes comfortably and effectively. She often uses her literacy to organize things not only for herself, but also for others in the family. She is the parent who interacts most readily with the school; her husband Russell goes to scheduled conferences and Open House when he can, but Denise keeps track of and schedules such events. And she told me, "Russell always asks the kids if they did their homework, but I help them with it. I'm more comfortable with it than Russell is."

I found myself wondering where Eric fits in this situation. Does he see school and print literacy as more closely aligned to women than to men? I wondered, how much experience does Eric have with reading and writing at home? And what other literacies does he have and use outside of school?
**Figure 5-2 Denise's Drawer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Road atlas</td>
<td>&quot;We listed things we wanted to do on our trip to Pennsylvania.&quot; (in back of atlas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valentines from the children</td>
<td>&quot;They made these for me.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tax forms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>owner's manuals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pages from magazines, mainly <em>Better Homes and Gardens</em></td>
<td>&quot;things we want to buy...house plans for dreams...things I want to do: how to make wreaths...how to tile...wainscoting...how to wallpaper&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>how-to manuals for car repair</td>
<td>&quot;That's Russell's.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>film envelopes</td>
<td>&quot;when we were deciding on colors&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paint charts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dictionary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pocket thesaurus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cards, such as Easter cards from last year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poster of a rock group to which her cousins used to belong</td>
<td>&quot;This was done when we had a reunion; see the picture from the 60's with the long hair.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weight watcher's stuff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>something to send for bills</td>
<td>&quot;I forgot about this.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>menus from a few restaurants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"I never read at home."

Eric told me several times, "I never read at home." He was especially emphatic about that when he spoke about New Hampshire. "I'm outside all the time. The only time I come in is to eat or go to the bathroom...[Or] go to bed and

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sometimes to warm up. Most of the time I'm outside until it's almost midnight."

Denise laughed at that and rolled her eyes: "That must be when you go up alone [with Dad]."

Eric claimed he never read at home in Newbridge either, except for homework. After school, Eric usually went straight to the refrigerator to get a can of soda or a frozen pizza, but he said, "I just look at the package; I don't read the words." One day, he and Nicole were playing their new Nintendo game, and Denise pointed out that he read the words on the screen. Eric countered, "I didn't read the words." He said he just figured out what to do or found out from his sister.

One afternoon, Denise got the map out of the drawer in the kitchen side-board so she and Eric could show me where Eric was going in the summer with his uncle. The trip was to take a week. Denise joked, "Now I'll owe my brother forever."

"Where are you gonna go?" I asked, and Eric told me, "Ohio. To see the largest roller coaster." He was unsure where in Ohio, and he asked his mother. "San Diego?" "No!...San Diego's in California. Sandusky." She showed him the route on the map. "You're gonna go through Massachusetts, and New York, and part of Pennsylvania, and Ohio." Eric watched as she traced the route and said, "Yeah," as Denise pointed to each state. He read some of the route numbers. But when his mom pointed out his reading of the map, he said, "I didn't read. I looked at the O." Like the children in Trackton that Heath documented (Heath, 1983), Eric read configurations and contexts rather than print. But there were times when he had incidental interactions with print without even thinking about it or recognizing it as reading.
Denise got out Eric's baby book to show me records of his early life, as Eric and Nicole leaned over the kitchen table to take a look. Eric flipped through pages censoring what I could see: "No, don't turn the next page." Denise was surprised at him. "Why? What's wrong with that?" but I assured Eric I'd look at only those things he wanted to share. He was shy about me seeing some of the photos. He peered at the family tree in the beginning of the book and read many of the words softly, "'Your family heritage. Becky Eldredge.' Who's she?" Denise answered, "Grampa's mother." Eric read another name, "Denise Lavoie. Who's...Oh, yeah!" and Denise laughed as he recognized that it was her maiden name.

At eighteen months, Denise had written that Eric was "a handful," and at 20 months, she noted that he played with keys and plugs, observing, "Maybe he'll be an 'electrician." At two and a half, she noted that he "doesn't say much. He tries, but it doesn't come out right." The preschool wondered about his speech and expressive language, too. Denise told me that the pediatrician assured her he would outgrow it, but she was unconvinced and sought help. I later learned that Eric received speech therapy from preschool through third grade.

"Oh, look, you saved his first drawing," I exclaimed, and Nicole observed, "A truck!" Eric had drawn it in loopy crayon lines at age three and a half. On another page documenting age three, Denise had written that he liked "any books about trucks and tractors." But she told me she didn't read much to him. "He was too active; he wouldn't sit still." She didn't read much to Nicole, either, who was only a year and a half older. "I was so busy chasing Eric."
When Denise retrieved Eric's School Memories book from the hope chest in her room, Eric was even more interested. He looked in the pockets in which his mother had saved school pictures and representative papers from each school year. Each page had a place to list information from that year. "Who were my friends in first grade?" Eric asked, craning his neck to look at the names recorded on the page. He read: "Best friends: Danny, Sandy, and Chad. Special Events and Field Trips: Aquarium." He read friends' names on a couple of other pages, and when he reached the fourth grade page, he took a pen to write his friends' names in. "How do you spell 'Ramon'? he asked, then spelled it himself, a couple of letters at a time.

Despite his claims to the contrary, Eric did do functional reading at home, though it was limited. I also saw evidence of writing embedded in play activities. Under the neighbors' porch, the children still had a wooden sign from their summer clubhouse. Eric had made it, engraving their names with his woodburning tools. One day, I saw a series of bike paths Eric, Nicole, and a couple of other children had drawn on the sidewalk with chalk. The lines wound down the walk, up a driveway, around a neighbor's little parking lot, down the driveway, and into the street. I asked Eric to tell me about the roads the children had made, but he deferred to Nicole, who explained the rules they'd created for all the intersections. Many of the places were labeled: parking lot, school, Bradlees. Eric had participated in the designing, drawing, and writing, but he told me, "I didn't write it. Well, I only wrote one word."

Another day, he said he had "a note for a club that's opened." Unfortunately, I never saw that message because something interrupted the train of our conversation, and later when I asked to see the note, Eric had thrown it out. The same thing
happened with his Christmas list; it was discarded before I could see it. Denise was really pleased with the list. She told me Eric had listed items by category: toys, games, clothes, computer. Eric injected, "Next year, I'll only have ten things on my list 'cause there's one really expensive one I want...A computer." Denise also told me about a note she found in Eric's backpack: "Daryl, do you have my $1?"

Items such as the clubhouse memo, the note, and the Christmas list were useful and embedded in events important to Eric. Once they served their immediate usefulness, they were discarded. Print was valued for its functionality.

Eric's father later told me about the old tractor magazines Eric's grandfather had piled in the garage in New Hampshire; he said Eric often browsed in them while he worked nearby on a vehicle. Eric did read and write at home, even a bit in New Hampshire. But his reading was not extensive and did not include reading much connected prose. It was more like the unnoticed momentary writing activities of young children that Taylor documented (1983, 56-58) -- activities done so fleetingly that parents paid them no mind. Eric's at-home reading and writing, embedded as it was in other activities, went unnoticed by him or did not count as reading and writing to Eric. His definition was based on school activities: reading books and writing stories. Those literate activities did not hold a place for him at home, so he believed he didn't read or write. Because Eric was uncomfortable with print and uncertain about his ability to read it, he limited his reading as much as he could. I wondered if he held a kind of reverse pride in eliminating reading and writing from his life outside of school, as if his identity depended only on physical activity. Perhaps
because he knew reading and writing were problematic for him, he wanted home to be a place where he could claim they didn't matter at all.

**A Child of Few Words**

One fall afternoon, as Denise and I sat in the kitchen, Eric came in from playing and announced, "I'm gonna fix my train set." I asked to watch and he shrugged okay. Set in an oval on the rug in his room, the train was a beauty -- a big, black Lionel like the one my brothers used to have, with many cars (more in the toy box, along with additional track), a plastic station, and a tunnel ("not done yet") which Eric had made of craft sticks. Eric made multiple trips to the cellar for needed tools (wire cutters first, then a huge coil of wire, then a small wrench and two screwdrivers of different sizes) and used them to strip and reattach wires to the transformer. He got the train working, only to have it spin off the track, but he looked closely, discovered the problem, and adjusted the track. Then it was back to wire adjustments again. Eric was clearly used to using the tools; I wondered how many ten-year-olds have that knowledge. I asked him questions now and then as he worked and he gave me the kind of clipped, matter-of-fact answers I had come to expect from him. He'd tell me the tool was so he could "unscrew this" (pointing) and when I asked why, he'd say, "to get the wire on." Not very forthcoming with information, Eric nevertheless knew what to do and enjoyed both figuring out the problems and solving them.

Many other times, I saw evidence of things Eric knew, but he had little to say about his knowledge or his processes. Eric's nonverbal nature sometimes frustrated me. Once I even wrote in my field notes: "Does he have any metacognitive
awareness at all?" I wondered if I should have chosen a more talkative informant. But I needed to understand him and other children like him; I had to find his way of making meaning, rather than expecting him to conform to mine.

It helped me to remember studies I'd read of people in other cultures. Scollan and Scollan showed the miscommunications that resulted between Athabascan peoples and mainstream society because of different communication patterns and unstated rules for interactions. Phillips (1972) documented Navajo concepts of time which differ from mainstream assumptions. John Lofty's work in a Maine fishing village (1990) had shown me that different cultural norms exist even amongst groups that appear outwardly similar to the majority culture. Maybe Eric's ways of interacting were the result of some cultural forces I did not yet fully understand. I kept trying to see things from his point of view, but it was very difficult for me. It was disconcerting to realize that he might feel equally disconnected from the step-by-step explicit instruction which middle class American culture -- and our schools -- so value. To Eric, the doing appeared to be the important thing. Why talk about it? Why not just show the results? That was how Eric reacted with his sled.

"Like This"

One afternoon late in the fall, Eric announced he was going to work on his sled. "Your sled?" I exclaimed. As Eric bustled out of the room, Denise explained to me, "He made a sled." I called after Eric, asking to see it, and a minute later he returned from the basement workshop carrying a large, homemade sled. I was truly impressed. On long skills given to him by a neighbor, Eric had mounted three strips of wood and nailed on a sheet of plywood to make a seat. Figure 5-3 shows his
finished sled. When I first saw it, the sled had not yet been painted and there were no handles on it.

Figure 5-3 Eric's Finished Sled

"How did you make it?" I asked Eric, as he knotted the end of some rope he was holding. He replied, "Skiis and wood." I stuck to my middle class script and repeated, "How?" Eric offered, "If you want to use screws, you need an electric drill." Instead of repeating myself again, I followed up his statement. "Do you have a drill to use?" "It's my father's," he explained, and Denise interjected, "Can you use it?" "Yeah," Eric maintained. "Only...?" Denise prodded. "When he's here," Eric conceded.
But Denise let him off the hook, saying no more about the unauthorized use of the drill. She was distracted; a community college brochure had come in the mail, and she was browsing, looking for a computer course that might help her at work. Eric started searching for something, pulling open the drawer in the sideboard, then looking in his room. He turned to his mother, "Where are the scissors?" "On top of the box," she replied. "If they're not there, look in Nicole's room." He did. "Got it!" he cried. He cut a bit of string, put the scissors down, and started uncoiling the rope.

"What's the rope for?" I wondered. Eric gave me a typical answer: "My sled." "But what's it for on your sled?" I persisted. Eric explained, "So I can pull it. I drilled holes with a five-eighths bit." Denise heard that and looked up from her brochure. "Was Dad here? Nooo." Eric didn't respond.

I tried again. "Tell me how you made your sled." Eric answered, enumerating slowly and pausing between items, "You need skis...an electric drill...a screwdriver... wood."

"What do you do?" I wondered.

Eric said, "You put it together."

"Is it hard?"

"It's kind of hard, but it's fun," he said.

"How big would you say it is?" I asked him.

Eric replied, "Wait a minute; I'll measure it. Which part, the skis?"

"Skis, seat..."

"Together?" he asked.

"Alone or together."
Eric stretched a measuring tape along the sled, but said he didn't know what it said. I helped him read the measurements, and we exclaimed over them. The seat was 40 1/2 inches and the skiis were five feet long.

Eric called out to Denise, "Look, Ma, it pulls." He started to hum. He took a bit of string to loop onto the rope -- to make it easier to pull, I assumed. He paused, opened the refrigerator, and took a drink, then told me, "I'm gonna put a seat right there (atop the wooden seat). Maybe off my tractor. And buy a new one." Then he reconsidered whether he really wanted to spend his money on a new seat cushion. "Nah! I'm saving up for a new four-wheeler."

He was tying the rope on now. I asked, "Where did you get the plywood?"

"From my workshop."

Denise looked up. "Whose workshop did you get it out of?"

"Me and Dad's."

"The skiis are a little crooked," Denise observed.

Eric said, "I want them that way. See, I'm gonna..." He sat on the sled, pulled on the rope so he was leaning back. "Ya-hoo!"

I tried again to find out what Eric's process had been. "Can you tell me what to do step-by-step to make a sled like this?"

As he had done before, Eric began by listing the materials. "You need skiis, you need wood, you need screws, and an electric drill. It's not done yet, still stuff to do, I'm gonna paint it."

Denise helped me out by repeating, "So how did you make it?"
This time, Eric obliged. "First flip over the skis like this," he said, picking up the entire sled and turning it over. He pointed to the wood blocks. "Put those there like that. Put a screw there (on a woodblock) and screw one." He turned his wrist to show how to twist in each screw and said, "Do that one, that one, that one, that one, and that one." Then he turned the sled again. "Flip it over like this. Put this piece of plywood on. Then do that one, that one, that one (indicating each screw). After, I took the five-eighths bit and drilled holes here...Today I put rope on it. Now I'm gonna go downstairs, take handles off of somethin'."

Denise challenged, "Off what?"

"The saw Dad got. But he has somethin' to carry it with and he says he do not need it."

"What are the handles for?" I asked.

"Gonna make something to hold that thing on."

"What thing?"

"The rope."

Denise asked, "Why? Sleds don't have handles to hold rope."

Eric explained, "So it don't get caught under here." He leaned down and pointed under the sled near the runners.

Denise nodded and said, "That's an idea."

Eric coiled the end of the rope. "Like that and that," he said. Then he stooped down by the sled again and tried to fix something on one of the wood blocks.

"Mom," he cried, "I stripped the screw so now it won't come out."

She wasn't sure what he'd said. "What?"
"By accident I stripped the screw." She didn't answer and he forgot that concern. He announced. "It's not goin' up New Hampshire either, because it'd get ruined up there and plus I'd never be able to take it back home." He told us, "I'm gonna make it a toboggan, put a curvy thing here."

Nicole had wandered in and she reacted skeptically to Eric's toboggan plans. She looked to Denise and me. "Ever think how he's gonna make 'em (the toboggan)"

Eric stuck up for himself. "Easy!"

"How?" I pressed him.

"I don't know."

"But it's easy?"

"I'll find a way," he told me.

"What color will you paint it?" Denise asked.

"Red." He told her he'd use the paint he painted the garage with. When Denise explained to me that it was a toy garage, Eric added that Nicole helped. He got some old newspapers from the pantry and started to spread them out, apparently preparing to paint, but Denise stopped him. She told him he could do it in the workshop when his father came home.

I still wanted information. "How did you get the idea for this sled?"

Eric replied, "I don't know. I had no sled. Well, I had a sled, but it was a wimpy one, didn't go over any jumps. Cause we're opening a place down by the station." I understood him to mean the hill beside the nearby gas station, but neither
Denise nor I was quite sure what he meant by opening "a place." Denise asked, "What's this?"

Nicole filled her in. "Him and Missy think they're gonna charge people."

"You can't do that; it's not your property," Denise told him.

Eric didn't react to that. He had sat down on the sled and was swaying side to side on it. "I wish there was snow. I'd be on this sled." He began making motion sounds and singing a bit, as he swayed. Then, since there was no snow, he left the sled behind as he headed outside with Nicole.

Eric's demonstration of his sled had given me some clues to what and how Eric knows.

**Terms, Tools, and Materials.** Clearly, Eric knows a great deal about building things. He used appropriate vocabulary easily, speaking of a variety of tools (saw, screwdriver, a five-eighths bit) and materials (plywood and screws, including stripping of screws).

More than knowing the terminology, Eric knew what to do. On his own, he used a variety of tools, even the drill he was supposed to use only with his father's supervision. He gathered available materials and figured out how to put them together to make something useful and meaningful. He used many of the materials in creative ways which differed from their original uses, transforming skis into runners, a board into a seat, handles into a container for rope. He also considered transposing a tractor seat into a seat for the sled. He considered not only materials present in his current environment, but also remembered materials, visualizing different uses for them.
Materials are important to Eric. Four times when I asked him to explain the sequence by which he made the sled, he told me instead which materials he used. To him, materials are more important, more basic than a description of his process. He can get his hands on those, be connected to them. Once you have the materials, you can make something. Without them, the process does not exist.

**A Real Product.** Eric clearly valued his product. He made plans to use it. He thought about how to improve it, not only adding a rope but figuring a way to keep extra rope out of the way underneath. He considered making a softer seat borrowed from "his" tractor up north, but reconsidered when he realized that he'd then have to use the money he'd been saving for a four-wheeler in order to replace the tractor seat. He planned to paint the sled. He also mentioned modifying it to make a toboggan and though he was unsure how he would do that, he was confident he could figure out a way. With a friend, he had even thought of a way to use the sled in his own neighborhood business: charging other kids for rides. He treated the sled as a valuable possession, deciding to keep it at home in Newbridge, so it wouldn't get ruined up north. No mere busy work, this project led to something real and useful.

**Relationship: "Me and Dad's."** The conversation about the sled hinted at Eric's strong relationship with his father. He identified the basement workshop as his until his mother called him on it ("whose workshop?"). He would have liked to identify his father's territory as his own, but settled for shared ownership ("me and Dad's"). Similarly, he referred to "my" tractor. He hinted at shared discussions with his dad in his assertion that he was going to remove the handles from his father's saw;
Eric claimed to know his dad no longer needed them. He spoke as if he were almost an equal with his dad, a fellow worker or carpenter, who shares workspace and tools.

**In Motion.** Eric responded kinesthetically to my request for an explanation of how he made the sled. There's much motion in Eric's demonstration and in the way Eric plays on the sled, leaning as if on a ride in the snow. When I asked him about the sled's size, he didn't estimate or evade the question; he moved to do something, to actually measure it. The sled itself represents motion. Eric was pleased when he had attached the rope because the sled could now move: "See, Mom, it pulls."

Gardner (1983) identifies bodily-kinesthetic intelligence as one of seven human intelligences, and one which our society frequently undervalues. Its applications range from dance and mime to typing and fine handiwork. Not only in his enjoyment of the motion represented by the use of his sled, but also in the fashioning of it, Eric has demonstrated bodily-kinesthetic intelligence.

**Show the Process.** Eric knows the process by which he made the sled, but he knows it more in the doing than in telling about it. He did not respond to my question of "how" until his mother followed up my question with her own, "So how did you make it?" At that point, he showed us, physically picking up the sled to demonstrate, actually rotating his hands to show how he inserted the screws, and pointing to the places where the screws belonged. He used only those words necessary to support his demonstration. His first response when I asked what he did was matter-of-fact and general: "Put it together." Demonstrative pronouns ("like this" "over here," "that one") appear over and over again in his description.
Realizing this, I was again reminded of the work of Scollan and Scollan (1981) and Lofty (1990). In some cultures, demonstration is the mode of teaching, unlike mainstream American teaching which is highly dependent on explication. Thai Weavers, for example, have difficulty saying what they do, though they can easily and effectively show it. Like them, Eric expressed his knowledge more kinesthetically than verbally, handling the materials and moving -- almost replicating what he did when he created the sled, as well as indicating what he planned to do in the future outside in the snow. Eric could tell some of the things he knew and some of the things he did, but he communicated by demonstration rather than explanation.

I thought of Eric in school, where he is expected to demonstrate his knowledge in words, writing his reaction to the story, explaining his answer to the math problem. School expectations must be as difficult for Eric as they would be for me if building and repairing things, rather than reading and writing, were the main subjects. Eric's favored communication patterns, as well as his favored activities, are not highly valued in school -- or in mainstream urban culture.

**Eric at School**

**Mismatched Communication**

Eric's preferred mode of communicating (showing or watching) is not as explicit as the kind of communication valued by school. Even in Ms. Worth's class, there are many whole-group sessions. In those, Eric usually sits quietly. He sometimes plays with his pencil or a rubber band while he waits -- connecting kinesthetically with something in a non-disruptive way. He seldom raises his hand.
A couple of times I saw him eagerly volunteer -- once when the student teacher was seeking volunteers to demonstrate an experiment about static electricity at the front of the room. No doubt he was interested because of its hands-on nature and his interest in the way things work. The experiment called for real *doing*, not reading or writing or talking about it. But the student teacher called on someone else.

Beth Worth's class offered more opportunities for active involvement than most American fourth grades do -- projects such as making model tipis while studying Native Americans or full-size mobiles of famous people when reading biographies. Eric enjoyed making stick puppets for a puppet show about a folk tale with a group of classmates. He did not want a speaking part, but manipulated puppets from behind the scenes (again, he preferred motion to talk). He sometimes joined Ramon in making drawings or paper constructions, such as a fine drawing of one of Columbus' ships for their contribution to the class presentations about biographies.

But much of the time, school communication patterns differ from those Eric prefers. Teachers explain in words, rather than showing. In Ms. Worth's class, children may move around the class, but few activities require or depend on motion. Tools are available, but for safety reasons, their use is controlled. Eric is asked to read and write, rather than to build and experiment with mechanical things, and he knows he is weaker in reading and writing than most of his classmates. Eric has found strategies to help him cope with the demands of literacy in school.

**Coping with Reading**

One morning I watched as Eric and Daryl read together. They were sitting side by side at the research table. They had been part of a small group reading *The
Chalk Box Kid with the student teacher, but today the teacher had split the children into pairs. Ramon, another member of the group, was cutting out Pilgrims in honor of Thanksgiving next week, while the teacher sat with Carlos on the floor, taping his oral reading. "Come on, Ramon," she urged, and Ramon reluctantly put down his scissors.

Meanwhile, Daryl ran a marker along under the words as he read steadily and accurately. When Eric took his turn, he started in the wrong place and Daryl corrected him: "No, Chapter 8." Daryl continued to monitor and correct Eric as he read. When Eric was unsure of the word "garage," he turned and asked me, and I suggested he reread the sentence to see what would make sense there. But Daryl figured it out and blurted out the word. This fit the pattern of much of the reading in a small group; though they were reading from a work of literature, some of the problems associated with basal reading groups remained. As Allington (1985) has noted, only one child is truly active in such round-robin situations; the others merely wait until it is their turn. In this case, with no teacher monitoring, Daryl participated throughout, thereby minimizing Eric's participation even further. Before Eric could attempt to figure out words and meanings on his own, Daryl supplied them.

I remembered that Eric sometimes reread his own writing, but as he read the book aloud, he did not reread; he kept reading word by word, calling the words but seeming to pay little attention to the meaning. Once, he read the final sentence in one paragraph and the first sentence of the next as if there were no period or space between them. The two sentences run together made no sense, especially since Eric skipped over a word he did not know. Thus he read, "They sounded...the pictures."
The actual words were: "They sounded excited. The pictures..." When he came to the end of the page, he stopped in mid-sentence, and Daryl picked up reading at the top of the next page.

I wondered how much Eric had understood, since it appeared his energy went into pronouncing the words. *The Chalk Box Kid* is the story of a lonely boy who finds a deserted chalk factory near his inner-city home and draws a magnificent garden on its walls.

MV to Eric: What did you think of *The Chalk Box Kid*?

Eric: It was good.

MV: What was good about it?

Eric shrugs.

MV: What's it about?

Eric: Kid who makes a garden.

MV: How does he do it?

Eric: With seeds and stuff.

Eric had concentrated so hard on figuring out the words that he did not grasp the meanings. The book may have been too difficult for Eric. But the surprising thing was that he did not seem to care that he did not comprehend it. Even if he thought he understood its general point, he must have suspected that he knew only the barest outline of the story and missed much of what he was reading. Or is it possible that he has had so little success with reading that he does not expect it to make sense? Anderson's study of children's perceptions of seatwork (1984) showed that many children paid no attention to the sense of the work. They saw the purpose as mainly
to complete the work by whatever means they could -- looking at others' work, even answering randomly. That seemed to be Eric's motivation for his reading and for worksheets in any subject (though there were relatively few in Ms. Worth's class, except in math).

Having finished reading *The Chalk Box Kid*, the boys worked on a packet of questions the student teacher gave them. They worked together, so when Eric did not know the answer, he relied on Daryl. Again, Eric's goal appeared to be simply to get it done.

On group reading of any kind, Eric was not disruptive, but he was seldom engaged. When the class read *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* in a large group "Readers' Theater," Eric never took a part, and he seldom attended closely to the story. He played quietly with his eraser or looked into space, periodically returning his gaze to the page and somehow finding his place. (Often, Kelley, his neighbor, pointed it out to him.) One day when I came in in the middle of the story, I wanted to know who some of the characters were, so I whispered to Eric, "Who's Veronica Salt?" He shrugged. "Who's Augustus Gloop?" He shrugged again. I queried, "You don't really know?" and he whispered back, "It's different than the movie." "How?" I asked. "Longer," he replied.

Just as Eric avoided reading connected text at home, he often avoided it at school. But though Eric missed some information and often lost his place, he listened, and he laughed in the right places. One day, everyone thought it very funny when Ms. Worth read without censoring the word "ass." A few minutes later when I sat down beside Eric, he told me, "You should be taping this. When everyone
laughed..." He flipped back a couple of pages and pointed to the line containing the risque word. When sufficiently interested, Eric could attend to the text!

**Getting It Done: Relying on Others**

Eric frequently used other children to help him get finished. He was not cheating; children were often encouraged to collaborate and to help each other. When reading in a small group, other children often supplied the words Eric had trouble with, and to answer questions from the student teacher, he used cues from the other children calling out. McDermott and Hood (1982) have also noted this social phenomenon in which children cover for others (though at times, in more competitive situations, they may structure the social interactions to display another's weakness) (1982, 242) Eric used help from other children not only in reading, but sometimes to complete his math, too. One day, working collaboratively in a small group to solve some math problems, Eric followed Ramon's lead, even changing his correct answer to one of the problems.

Why did Eric rely so much on others? Hood, McDermott, and Cole (1980) studied two children who were "in great trouble in that they were far behind their peers in learning to read. Worse, from extended looking, it became clear that under ordinary classroom circumstances, neither child would have much chance of catching up...the day was not made up of opportunities to learn to read, but of either occasions in which it was possible to try to read without fear of degradation or occasions in which the display demands were so high that the best results could be had by working at not getting caught not knowing how to read. When it was safe, both children would have a go at it; when accusing eyes were on them, they would have only a
McDermott and Hood claim that "It is not the high and low abilities that are at issue in the classroom, but rather the scheduling of people being called on to display and show off their apparent abilities and disabilities." (1982, 242)

But Eric's classroom was structured differently than the ones studied by Anderson and McDermott, Hood, and Cole, in that there was no regular reading group which required round robin reading and no expectation that Eric perform before the whole group. In short, the atmosphere was safer in that he was not put on the line in front of his peers. Why, then, did Eric demonstrate many of the same coping behaviors that researchers have noted among struggling students in more traditional classrooms? Those behaviors were most apparent when Eric worked on worksheets or when he worked with a small group. Each of those situations does call for display of knowledge: one in supplying answers to printed questions or math work, and the other in front of a small group not unlike a round robin reading group. In those situations, Eric wanted to get the work done and avoid showing what he did not know, even if the work made little sense to him. It was not just shyness. At home, he willingly showed off his sled of which he was rightfully proud. In reading, he felt he had no real product to share. When Eric had the opportunity to choose his own reading materials, he willingly read joke books, books about cars, and Shel Silverstein poetry -- books which were familiar to him and which he understood. Similarly, in writing workshop, he chose topics that mattered to him and his writing always made sense.
Getting it Done: Other Strategies

Eric did not rely exclusively on other people. He made educated guesses about the directions. When asked to do word problems, if the class was studying multiplication, he assumed he should multiply, until he got it wrong and was asked to look at it again. He also knew how to use clues in the classroom, including written ones, such as the multiplication matrix which was posted prominently in the room (a literate skill akin to the incidental reading he did at home). At other times, uncertain of his math facts, he counted on his fingers. All of these are strategies that work, and some of them involve print literacy. In fact, Eric was highly competent at using strategies such as these, which are more similar to the processes people use in the real world. As Resnick has pointed out (1987), school expects "pure mentation," but outside of school people use tools, each other, and situation-specific skills to solve problems. Those options are open to Eric in his classroom, though the teacher does not necessarily expect him to use them nor does she always sanction them. In fact, until I reported my observations to her and to Eric's parents, none of them had realized that he relied so heavily on the multiplication chart and did not truly understand multiplication.

Sometimes Eric went to the student teacher or teacher for clarification and direct help on particular items. Asking for help is a positive strategy, but even as he sought help, Eric's goal seemed to be to complete the work and get it right, rather than to deeply understand it. When asked to color drawings of the earth to show different seasons, he simply looked at the example on the front board and replicated it. I asked him, "Is that fall?" He looked at the label on the board. "Yep." "How do
you know?" I asked. "'Cause it's brown." "But how do you know that's fall?" "I dunno," he said, as he continued coloring. "Is it the way the earth is tilted or something?" I asked. Eric didn't reply. After a pause, Kelly, sitting nearby, offered: "It's the way the earth is tilted to the sun." Eric paid her no attention. He had finished his diagram and went to hand it in.

 Occasionally, however, Eric used other people effectively in ways that helped him toward understanding (though his personal objective may have been merely to "get it right.") One day, Eric was doing some multiplication word problems created by some of his classmates (previously given as a homework option). The problems were labeled with the names of the students who had created them, and Eric told me, "I know how to get it right -- ask the people who made them." Then he turned to Mark and said, "You made this one. What's it say?" Mark read it, and Eric did the problem. Then he turned to me for help: "On Number three, I think 'in all' means 'add.' Right?" I told him it could be addition or multiplication; it depends. I had him read the problem to me. In it, there were six children, each with five pencils. I suggested he picture six groups of five, and he wrote down:

\[
\begin{align*}
6 \\
x5 \\
25
\end{align*}
\]

"Right problem, wrong answer," I said, and he chanted while sticking out his fingers one by one: "5 -10-15-20-25-30!" Here Eric appeared to be operating in what Vygotsky (1978) calls the Zone of Proximal Development. More than turning to a peer to say, "What'd you get?" and recording his friend's answer, Eric made predictions: "'In all' means 'add,' right?" With guidance, he figured out what the
problem called for, and again with guidance, he self-corrected. Clearly, the right kind of support from peers and teacher helped, while in other situations, Eric simply let others do the thinking for him. I needed to know more about his learning to know how to provide opportunities for more of the supportive interactions.

I did know one thing. The literacy called for in reading books like *The Chalk Box Kid* or *Annie and the Old One* which Eric read with assigned groups, and the literacy required to do math sheets and word problems had little connection with Eric's own world or interests. Think how different they were from the world of his train, his sled, and his weekends in New Hampshire. Books, to Eric, were decidedly disconnected from his world -- as were the follow-up work about them. A notable exception was that while discussing *Annie and the Old One*, the student teacher asked the children about Annie's chores. Then she asked them about their own chores. Eric was interested then and spontaneously spoke out; later, given some comprehension questions to answer, he wrote that his chores were "feed my dog, take out the tarch [trash]."

**Personal Connections**

Ironically (considering the challenge it offered him), writing workshop was the place where Eric could best connect his personal life and interests to the requirements of school. It offered openings to Eric, spaces where he could bring into school the things he knew and loved. Also, his writing, unlike his reading, offered finished products -- final pieces, frequently typed, that he could put into his Best Book.
Eric continued to write personal narratives, and we began to find out about his interests. He began to plan what he would write the next day: "I am writing about my dog. I will be done by the 12." Such planning happened even more after Eric went with his family to Disneyworld in mid-October. He came back full of stories. He spent four days working on his Florida piece. On October 24, he wrote on his chart, "all fansns [finished] I wish I was still there." Then Ms. Worth helped him focus on a particular event -- his ride on Space Mountain -- and she helped him make a web of ideas. She talked to him about the experience and recorded his ideas on paper for him to use later. She told me later how much she had enjoyed interacting with Eric. Eric kept adding "one more thing" to the web, and as she'd try to stop, he'd think of "one more thing." It became a joke between them. The Space Mountain piece was about twice as long and more detailed than any piece Eric had written so far. His unedited version of the piece follows.

**Space Mountain**

I went on Space mountain 7 times. It was fun. When I went on it the first time I was kind of scared. You are not really going fast. It seemed like it. I sat in front 3 times. It was fun. It was so dark I could hardly see the track. When you went up you could see people going by. The rollercoaster picked up speed as we went. I went on it with my friend Andrew my uncle Richard my dab and TJ. There were too steep hills in it. I also went Big Thunder Railroad. Space mountain was better although. I was scared going down the 2nd hill. I lost my voice and tried to yell like my uncle Richard. I like space mountain a lot because it was fast.

Beth Worth was pleased that Eric had included so many specifics ["so dark I could hardly see the track; "picked up speed as we went"] and feelings ["when I went on it the first time I was kind of scared"]. She told Eric her favorite part was when he wrote. "I tried to yell like my Uncle Richard." She commented to me on how often
Eric mentioned his uncles and how important they seemed to be in his life. Eric showed himself in this piece and in others written around this time, such as "My Father's Four Wheeler." Writing was a place for him to let his personality shine through and for him to acknowledge relationships that were important to him.

Eric also wrote acrostics about Thanksgiving and Christmas, and with Daryl, he completed a fiction piece, *The Three Dragons*, which Ms. Worth read with enthusiasm. It had many of the conventions of folk tales: "once upon a time," *three* creatures, multiple attacks by an evil character (a vulture) who is finally outwitted, and a repeated refrain, "Not by the smoke of our fire, fire, fire."

Eric also wrote some poems about fall with Daryl and Carlos. The three collaborated, constantly rereading the verses as they wrote them, checking spellings with each other, then deciding to write poems about all four seasons. The boys had agreed on the line, "In the winter, it is cold," and they were trying to find the next phrase. When Carlos suggested, "The winter is cold, the winter is fun, the winter is coming, 'cause it's almost all done," Eric objected: "No, cause it's not." Unlike math or reading worksheets where all that counted was the right answer, Eric expected this to make sense. A few minutes later, he suggested, "In the winter, it is cold; in the winter you get all kinds of snow," and the others immediately agreed, "yeah!"

The three children remained on task for the entire class period except for a brief interlude in which they discussed Santa Claus. In a sing-song voice, Eric had suggested for the poem: "In the winter, it is Christmas, and Santa Claus goes down your chimney and says, 'Ho, ho, ho.'" Daryl started to accept it, but Carlos rejected it, "No, don't write that down." Eric asked the others, "Do you believe in Santa?"
"No, do you?" "No," he said. Carlos explained that he never got presents labeled "from Santa" -- they're 'from Mom' or stuff like that," but then Daryl said, "One night I stayed up with my parents... I heard bells, around the house, going around my house, and I seen something in the sky, looked like a shooting star. It went so far..." The discussion slipped into talk of a Christmas movie for a brief moment, until Carlos objected, "Come on, we have to finish this," and the boys again focused on their writing.

The boys directed great energy to the task they had set for themselves -- perhaps because it arose from their own intentions. The nature of their work together, based as it was on conversation and genuine problem-solving and shared decision-making, led them to invest much energy into their project -- so much energy that not even speculations about Santa could lead them away from it for very long. When I listened to the tape later, I was struck by that energy and investment. Though Carlos and Daryl spoke more often and more forcefully, Eric's reactions in reading groups -- and working on math papers -- was so different from his participation in this situation. Here, Eric was not reactive and overreliant. He actively offered and discussed ideas.

But other than Space Mountain, the piece that demanded the most investment of Eric was one he wrote in January about bonfires. His printed first draft filled a full page, and though the text was disjointed in a few places (for Eric added details as he thought of them), the piece was full of information. He began with a clear main point: "Up New Hampshire we have bon fires." Then he told what they do at the bonfires: put gas on them, burn an old house, which was "half way down," and burn
a camper, which his uncle pulled with his car. That reference to a car led Eric to a statement about another vehicle -- the Bombi (short for "Bombadiere," a brand name) which another uncle drove through the fire. After those general statements, Eric mentioned recent and forthcoming bonfires. Then his thoughts became more haphazard -- another fact about the fire in which they burned the camper, statements about the fun, the heat, and plans for campfires next summer. At the end, his points again held together, as he explained what they will take (or what they do take) to the fires.

I was not in school the days that Eric wrote the first draft of the piece, but several days later, I sat nearby as he typed the final draft on the computer. I noted that his spelling had improved since the fall: though spelling continued to be difficult for him, he no longer omitted vowels. As he typed, Eric decided to add another sentence about the camper and asked me how to spell "decided." After "We also burned a camper," he added: "We had an old worn out camper that we didn't want anymore so we decided to burn it." Eric was treating the work like his own, not like an exercise, for it wasn't. Rather than just "getting it done," he chose to add to it. In short, he had several things going for him, which were not present on reading and worksheet activities: personal interest and investment, coupled with whatever time he needed to create a tangible product. He was able to use others as resources (such as soliciting my help with spelling), rather than using others to help him put down "the answer" whether it made sense or not. He had a conference with his teacher which led him to add more information to the piece. The final piece, after revision and editing, read as follows.
The Bonfires We Have

Up in New Hampshire we have bonfires. We put gas on them to start them. We burned an old house that was halfway fallen down. We also burned a camper. It was an old worn out camper that we didn't want anymore. My uncle Ron pulled it with his car. My uncle Roger went through it with his bombey. A Bombey is a kind of a tractor or a bulldozer. Last time I was up there we had a bonfire. We mostly burned brush. Next time I go up there we are going to have another bonfire. When we burned the camper we had to stand back away from it because it was hot. I think it was fun. Some of the bonfires we have are very hot.

This summer we are going camping. It is only going to be for three days. We are going to have a bonfire when we go camping. In the summer we are going to take the three and four wheelers. Usually when we have bonfires we buy soda and beer. Sometimes we will bring marshmallows so we can roast them on the fire. And we will bring a little radio with us. It's a lot of fun.

Bonfires can be dangerous so you have to be very careful. My dad has to call the fire department (or some special person) to get permission. We always have to hose hooked up to the faucet in case we need it, but we usually don't need it. The place where we burn is all dirt so the fire can't really get out of bounds.

Beth urged Eric to share his piece at sharing time, but he resisted. He still did not have enough confidence for that. Yet the measure of his investment could be seen in that, at home, he mentioned to his family that he was writing the piece. Denise had been pleased; she said it was unusual for him to mention what he did at school. She said, "Usually when I ask what he did at school, it's just 'Nothin'." Not long after Eric finished the piece, I visited the Eldredges one evening, and I took the finished piece with me. Eric agreed that all could read it. He said nothing, but he was obviously pleased as his family passed the paper around, commenting positively on it, and telling more stories about the bonfires.
**Eric and his Father**

**Russell Eldredge: "A Little Bit of Everything"**

Eric's stories at school -- some written, some told to me -- had convinced me that his father, Russell Eldredge, was a major influence on Eric. By mid-October, I had heard about his job driving trucks to move houses or to plow after storms. I knew about his various vehicles -- four-wheeler, tractor, snowmobile. Eric often talked fondly, if briefly, about trips he and his dad took to their camp. Clearly, Eric not only loved his dad, but admired and emulated him.

I finally met Russell Eldredge at the end of the first school quarter. The whole family, including Nicole, came to the school conference with Ms. Worth. Eric sat on the couch beside his dad, while Nicole sat in a chair at one side of the gathering and Denise in a chair on the other (at Eric's other side). I pulled up a chair slightly out of the circle, which was completed by Beth Worth in her chair, facing the couch. I had pictured Russell as a large, dark-haired rugged man, my stereotypical view of a trucker. To my surprise, he was trim, blond, and only slightly taller than his wife. Strong, yes, but in a compact way -- hardly the overweight, muscle-bound man I was ashamed to admit I'd expected. On the occasion of the conference, he did fulfill one expectation of mine, however. Like his son, he was quiet. He did not seem intimidated or uneasy in the setting; in fact, he appeared comfortable, greeting both Ms. Worth and me directly. But he spoke only a couple of times in the conference. He resembled another stereotype -- the taciturn, self-reliant Yankee.

However, Russell surprised me again that evening, for in the corridor after the conference, he talked readily to me about Eric, commenting especially on how much
Eric loved their northern place. After several minutes of chit-chat in the corridor, we agreed to get together soon, then signed off, heading in different directions to our parked cars.

One night a couple of months later, the family and I sat in their living room and browsed through photographs as we talked about their Disneyworld trip, the place up north. My tape recorder was not working, so Eric and his dad took over, placing a cassette in their tape player, setting the controls, and adjusting the microphone. Denise got out some photo albums so we could browse, and Eric rushed off to his room and came back with another photo album of his own. He turned the pages, and everyone pointed things out to me. "See that? That's the garage where we keep the four-by-fours." "Oh! That's the mud monkey. You know, like a dune buggy, jacked up on big wheels?" "See all the snow? We had our snow fort right under there."

There were some pictures of a house Russell had helped move, and I asked him to tell me about it. One work story led to another. I had trouble sorting out exactly what Russell's job was because he talked of hauling steel, making deliveries, welding, moving and raising buildings. "What exactly do you do?" I asked. Denise laughed. "The census taker just called and wanted to know what his occupation was. She said, 'I have mechanic [written down].' I said, 'Yeah, he does that, too.'"

Russell explained:

"We don't have that many people working for us because things are slow, so what I'm doing is ummm, I drive tractor and trailer and do all their heavy delivering. If there's a house to be moved, I do all the hauling. I haul the tractor down. Then I pull the house with it. If there's trailer work to be done, I have to work on the trailers. If there's welding to be done, if I'm not busy doing something else -- no
deliveries or moves aren't really going, not that busy -- I'll work with B-- Brothers [another company owned by his boss]. So it's a little bit of everything. It's a big company and it's a small company, and everybody can do a little bit of everything. If they need me in one area, they can put me there, and not worry about it because they know I know -- that I can do the job.

I discovered that Russell can do more than weld, haul, and raise houses. He has knowledge of small engine repair and manufacturing, electricity, plumbing, and carpentry -- all learned since high school. He talked extensively about how he learned alongside practicing tradesmen. The trucking, however, he "taught himself."

Russell Eldredge dropped out of school at seventeen. He explained that he worked nights in a restaurant in tenth grade "which was prob'ly a mistake -- explains why I never did my homework," and dropped out because "I had other interests." He worked for awhile on small motors, at a place which sent employees for training on the new versions of motors each year. "He sent us all. We didn't have to go, but it made us better, made the company better. So I enjoyed doing stuff like that. I guess in a way I wish that's what I could have done in school." Later he switched to working for a larger company that manufactured the motors -- "My father worked there -- how long, 40 years?" He said, "I never got none of this in school. I got it when I got out."

He talked about how he learned electrical work. The school guidance counselor called him two or three years after he dropped out. "What they were doing was going back to all the drop-outs and trying to, calling them and seeing how they were doing. They did care...And he'd notified me and asked me if I'd be interested in the program. He explained it and said, 'go down and see Frank. (What was his name?) He'll help. Tell him I sent you and he'll set you up. He'll fill the paper out and set you up.' What was good about it was they went out and got all these contracts for doing all these jobs, and they got a licensed
electrician and a licensed plumber and a licensed carpenter and they were the teachers. They had plenty of experience and they were the teachers...In the morning you had two hours of class and then you went out on the road and you worked. And you got paid for it. So it made me feel good. They tested us at the end of the six months. I got tested on what I got on my work and I got a 98. I was the only one, matter of fact, that passed! In the electrical field."

Later, Russell helped teach. He said:

Generally I did all right. It was right after that that I went to work with Matt plumbing and electrical...When I worked with Matt, I had some knowledge of plumbing because you were working along with these plumbers -- an electrician has to work with plumbers, so you pick up...So I had some idea of heating systems because I had worked around it. You pick it up after a while."

That evening, Russell explained several bits of information which he had "picked up." He told how to tap maple trees for syrup, how to grade wood, how to raise a house on pilings, and how to move a house. I had to stop to make sure I understood what the tractor and the trailer were. I asked how he used the truck to move the house, and he explained, "We don't back a trailer under the house. We put beams in the house..." and went on to describe the process more fully. Eric waited for a pause, then asked, "What about the house we were moving? How come we had the trailer for that?" Russell explained, "Because it was three pieces. It's quicker and easier, and it's light, Eric. That's why we did that. If the house is heavy, the trailer isn't going to hold one hundred ton. But the dollies will."

I admitted I did not understand everything the two of them were talking about. When Russell told Eric, "the trailer isn't going to hold one hundred ton," I assumed he meant a house might weigh a hundred ton and one trailer couldn't handle that, but if it were broken into three pieces, it was light enough to back the truck...
under each piece to carry it. What was this about dollies? Eric seemed to understand. I never got to ask, because something interrupted that thread of the conversation, and we started talking about something else.

The interchange was instructive to me, not just on an informational level, but an affective one. I was the learner, Russell the teacher. He knew his topic so well that he assumed I understood some simple terminology, but in fact, I did not. He and Eric each had enough background knowledge of the topic so that they understood each other's cryptic question and technical answer. But as a new learner in the field under discussion, I understood only the barest gist of it. Thinking of this later, I wondered, how often are Eric and other children in situations like that in school? The teacher and some of the students have some assumed background knowledge and vocabulary, which others must try to figure out on the spot. Before some children truly comprehend, the discussion moves on, and the learner (like me in this tables-turned situation) is left with only a hazy, general awareness of the subject, far from true understanding. You learn easily only when you already have some knowledge of the subject at hand or a way to relate it to something else you already know.

As we talked about woodworking, Russell urged Eric to "Show her the comforter rack you made." Eric did, and I exclaimed over it; it was a beautiful piece, elegantly shaped with smooth surfaces. Russell had cut it, Eric had sanded it, and he and his mother had stained it.

That evening, as Russell spoke about one topic and another, I kept asking him, "How do you learn stuff like that?" About grading wood, he told me, "I konw
the people. I talked to 'em and asked 'em how they graded wood, and they told me, this is how we do it." I pictured Eric at school asking the child beside him, "How do you do this?" I realized that such behavior could be seen not only as a coping mechanism, but as a genuine way to find out what you don't know. Suppose in school, we helped Eric (and other children) set up real problems which he (and they) wanted to figure out, instead of problems where he simply had to get "the right answer?"

As Russell spoke, I learned about his learning patterns, patterns which he is passing on to his son. Russell learned a multiplicity of skilled trades and interesting information by apprenticing himself to others. Some of the apprenticeships were in formal training situations, while others were simple conversations with people in the know...as the conversation with the sawyer. Even the training situations were less like school and more like the real world of work. Russell's learning was embedded in situations in which the knowledge he gained was immediately useful and applicable. It was concrete, rather than abstract; real, rather than an academic exercise; active, rather than passive. He could see the results of his work and reap the rewards of good work -- from a 98 on a practical test to an attractive comforter rack or a house successfully moved.

Much of Russell's learning was visual and tactile. He worked with materials he could see and touch and adjust as necessary. There were many parallels between Russell's learning and his son's. In fact, just as Russell learned from others more knowledgable than he, he now teaches his son in the same way. I understood more about Eric because of his similarities to his father.
Like Father, Like Son

Eric's home culture, particularly his close relationship with his dad, influences the way he learns and the way he sees himself and his roles at school, at home, and at his weekend home. Like the mentors described by so many of the creative people John-Steiner (1985) interviewed, Eric's father provides Eric with a model with whom he identifies and from whom he learns. Like Russell, he learns best as an apprentice to a more competent worker. Like Russell, he proceeds from the concrete -- actual objects and real-life situations -- and applies his learning in concrete ways. Eric is learning not only ways of learning, but also identifying the kinds of roles he assumes in life; he is being socialized into a particular family and community culture in which he identifies strongly with his male relatives, and especially his father.

As I thought about Eric's learning, I saw two strong themes which extended my understanding of his preference for demonstration rather than explication and for hands-on work rather than print (or even talk). The themes were apprenticeship and relationship. The themes are interwoven; apprenticeships depend on certain kinds of learning relationships; one's relationships depend on the self-concepts that are influenced by the learning which takes place in apprenticeships. I had an inkling of these themes when Eric first showed me his sled, but understanding his relationship with his father helped me to see more and to appreciate the range of Eric's non-print literacies. I took a closer look at the themes of apprenticeship and social roles/relationships as they applied in Eric's life outside of school to see how they related -- or might relate -- to his learning in school.
Apprenticeship: "I Just Watched."

Russell once said, "Eric is kind of a follower. I don't know if that's a good thing or not." I asked what he meant and he said, "He follows along. He watches."

Eric watches alongside his dad in their basement workshop, and once in a while Russell brings Eric along on a weekend trucking job. Like Russell, Eric learns by apprenticeship, by watching an expert, then trying it himself. I asked Eric how he knew what to do to fix his train, and he said, "I just watched. I watched." He meant he had watched his father repair it previously. He remembered what he "watched" and then tried it himself, even when his father was not there. About the four-wheeler he rides up north, Eric said, "He had to show me where everything...I knew how to ride my uncles's...it's kind of hard to explain."

Russell says he learned about cars "from my father and other people, and probably 80% I learned from trial and error and I think that's something [Eric's] doing right now." Eric has helped his dad rebuild the motor on a tractor, worked on cleaning the garage with his dad, watched his dad use an engine metal lathe. Just as Russell learned electricity and plumbing by working alongside an expert, Eric is doing the same. And just as his dad learned by doing, Eric sometimes plunges right in, getting his hands dirty in his attempts to figure things out.

In the neighborhood, Eric's seen as the expert at bike repair. I've seen him rush into the house for a wrench because "I have to fix the brakes on Missy's bike" and then to tinker and make the necessary adjustments. He has seen his Uncle Rick take apart his old car and put it back together. He has helped his dad and his uncles rebuild a truck engine. He has been there when his Dad attempted to fix the VCR by
dismanteling it (that was one project that failed, for which Russell receives some good-natured family ribbing). Eric does not need to have seen the very same activity to feel he can attempt certain projects. Because he recognizes similar elements among various projects, he feels confident about trying a different one on his own.

Eric's projects are not always successful. Once he took the brakes off his scooter and couldn't get them back on. But he knows the family stories about similar projects his dad tried at his age, such as the time Russell tried to surprise his dad by fixing the loose belt on the lawnmower. He got the mower apart and the belt tightened, but he couldn't put the mower back together. Russell says, "My father didn't yell. He just said, 'Be sure you know what you're doin' before you try somethin' next time." So when Eric took his bike apart to fix the chain guard and couldn't quite figure out the reassembly, Denise reminded Russell: "You can't yell at him. You did the same thing." And Russell didn't yell. He put the bike back together while Eric watched. (Perhaps that's why Eric was willing to risk using the drill to make his sled: Russell tells the story of how he used his father's electric saw without supervision and cut the tips of his fingers. Fearing his father's wrath, he hid his hand in his pocket, but when he was found out, his dad simply asked, "Did you learn your lesson?")

Apprenticeship of this kind requires watching and working alongside a more accomplished worker. Seldom does it mean reading printed instructions -- or even telling step-by-step directions. When the Eldredges got a new Nintendo game to replace one that had broken some time ago, I asked Eric to teach me how. His method was to take the hand-held controls from me and operate it himself -- to show
me. Once I asked Eric if he'd rather show people or tell them. He said, "Show. It's easier."

Lave's and Wenger's theory of learning as "legitimate peripheral participation" (1991) holds many similarities with the kind of learning we see here in Eric. Eric works alongside his father in the basement workshop, participating in the main work but in a peripheral way -- handing materials, doing particular tasks (sanding, staining), but not necessarily taking part in the entire process. Lave's research on the apprenticeship of Vai and Gota tailors showed that they learned the process in reverse, first helping with finishing work, such as hemming, and working up to the initial steps of designing and cutting the pattern. Likewise, many of Eric's contributions are the finishing stages of assembling, sanding, and staining (as in the toy shelf and comforter rack). But he observes the other stages and is learning to operate the machinery. Eventually, he will take on the earlier, more creative stages of designing and shaping the objects; already he undertakes the entire process on projects of his own, such as the sled.

But Lave and Wenger posit that their theory holds not just for situations which clearly operate as apprenticeships, but in all learning situations. Like Vygotsky (1986), they claim that learning begins in social interaction and is later internalized. Like Smith (1988), they believe people learn incidentally in real context. They may, however, learn things other than that which is intended (Dewey's "miseducative" experiences). In school, Eric and the other children continue to learn vicariously. Sometimes they learn the concepts and strategies the teacher intends to
demonstrate and teach, and sometimes they learn coping strategies, such as those previously described.

In *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach*, Howard Gardner (1991) advocates apprenticeships and children's museums as models for schools which build understanding. There were several occasions in Eric's fourth grade where he had such opportunities, and they were his most positive experiences — writing workshop, special art, and hands-on projects.

**Apprenticeships at School**

**Writing Workshop**

I have previously described how Eric used writing workshop to connect with personal experiences and interests and to create real products. Only later did I realize that the workshop setting, like the workshop in the Eldredge's basement, also provided elements similar to apprenticeship. In the writing workshop, Ms. Worth gave hints for parts of the process -- mini-lessons on development and use of detail, for example. She shared her own writing, the writing of children, and the writing of published authors -- finished products which serve as models. And when I sat down beside Eric as he typed his draft into the computer, I became a resource, as the master is to the apprentice. I urged him to do what he could do on his own, supported the areas in which he needed help, and provided answers when skills were beyond his current level (such as spelling difficult words). These elements were present in other successful interactions, too -- math exercises in which Eric cared about understanding as well as correct answers, and hands-on projects in which he had genuine products (such as a mobile or a miniature tipi) to show for his work.
Special Art

Another hands-on project which Eric loved also had elements of apprenticeship and required him to read and write to communicate. The art teacher, Carleen Smith, offered "special art" to children with difficulty reading and writing. She met about five children at a time, giving each one a packet with directions for an individual art project -- a clay porcupine, wooden reindeer (cut on the jigsaw), papier mache rat, totem pole, wooden truck, and a woodburned snake design. Each child had to follow the directions in the packet, but no talking was allowed throughout the several sessions it took to complete the projects. All communication to her was through note-writing. In addition, Ms. Smith required that the children bring in books about the animal or object they were making and base some of their work on information they read.

Eric attended many times and made all of the projects. I accompanied him one day when he was fashioning a porcupine from clay. He got his information packet, plunked the clay onto the tabletop, spread out newspaper, then leaned back in his chair until it rested on two legs, and read the instructions very intently. Soon he needed the toothpicks, but didn't know where they were. Whispering the words to himself, he wrote "Were is the toothpicks," handed the note to Ms. Smith and waited for a moment while Ms. Smith helped Daryl put on goggles. She wrote back, "Finish your animal first. Make four legs." Eric returned to his table, poked and pressed the clay for a few moments, then wrote and delivered another note: "can you help my do the legs," to which the written reply was "yes."
The correspondence continued as she sat beside him and helped him figure out what to do next; periodically she turned to write a reply to another child or left his table to temporarily supervise someone else. The only sounds were sandpaper rubbing against wood and the occasional scratch as a chair was pushed back on the linoleum floor. Eric pinched off bits of clay, rolled and shaped them into cylinders, and molded the legs onto the lump of clay he'd fashioned as the main body. As Ms. Smith returned, he scrawled, "How do you like it so fare?" She crossed out the superfluous "e" and replied, "Terrific." Soon, he worked on the animal's eyes, then responded to the teacher's written request: "It is clean up time now. Put the animal sculpture in the plastic bag. Clean up your mess and wash your hands." Eric's final note read, "do we come tomorrow".

Figure 5-4 is a photograph of a child and teacher corresponding during Special Art. Figure 5-5 shows a child at work. Figure 5-6 shows a bookshelf Eric made at home and several of the items he created at Special Art. (See next two pages.)
Figure 5-4 Corresponding during Special Art
Figure 5-5 At Work, Special Art

Figure 5-6 Eric's Bookshelf and Special Art Projects
Like the sled he made at home, the craft projects in special art allowed Eric to manipulate materials to make a concrete object. Unlike the reading activities in school where he coped by relying on others, here he was forced to rely on his own ability to read the messages his teacher gave him. Because they were such meaningful messages and so embedded in work he wanted to do, he appeared to have no trouble at all.

The side-by-side learning situations which resembled apprenticeships were the situations which Eric not only enjoyed, but in which he learned successfully. They were the places where he could bring his home and school literacies together.

How could apprenticeships in reading be constructed for him? Rather than large-class Readers' Theater or small group reading experiences unrelated to his interests, Eric might do better working with a single adult mentor, reading together. Or he might choose books on topics of interest to him, which he could read alone or with a partner with a goal in mind — a hands-on project to show others. Or he might read to younger children (he the master, the child the apprentice). The resource room teacher offered that opportunity in the spring, and Eric enjoyed it; unfortunately, I was not aware of it until later, so I did not observe it. In math, activities which required him to solve real problems with the help of a more accomplished peer or teacher (or in a small group with a clear task) might involve him more, requiring more thinking and less coping. Perhaps some of the manipulatives which are common in primary grades have a place in intermediate classrooms, too.
Relationships

One of the Guys

As I heard family stories about weekends in New Hampshire, I realized that Eric loves going to New Hampshire, not only for the outdoor activities, but also for the camaraderie. He often speaks of his uncles, frequently attaching information about one of their vehicles to their name: my uncle Leroy's tractor, my uncle Robert's snowmobile. Eric is included as "one of the guys" up north. He told me about the Thanksgiving holiday. He spent most of the day outside riding four-wheelers with the men. "Then after supper the ladies go outside for a walk and the men stay inside. Then when they come back, they start singing Christmas carols. We locked the door and wouldn't let them back in because the babies were sleeping." He explained that the men put the babies to bed that night. Eric showed me how he held the littlest one. "After only about five minutes, she just fell asleep."

Russell confirmed that up in New Hampshire, Eric was included with the men. "He's generally out with us all the time. We sit around, have a few beers, talk if it's a nice night, or go swimming in the pool if it's ready or go to the camp up back, called the Sugar House..." There was talk of a fishing trip with the men on which "Eric caught the only fish." I saw pictures of a fishing trip deep in Canada that the adult men had taken; there were hints that Eric would be able to go along on a similar trip when he's older. As we browsed through family photos, a snapshot reminded Eric of a famous family story that happened when he was a toddler: "My uncle and my father told me that they took me four wheeling and they were watching
me." Russell chuckled, "How many times are you going to tell that story?" Then

Russell told it:

He was about two years old, in New Hampshire, and [the women] went shopping or something, her [Denise] and Nicole, with that brown truck you saw, the mud monkey? So we had to babysit for Eric. So we got the car seat and went and took a ride up over a mountain, through the woods. And we saw these people hiking up the mountain. He was eating those hot fries and tonic, and as we were coming down off the mountain, these two ladies looked in at us and said, "What are you doing?" "We're babysitting." And we were covered in mud and everything."

Everyone laughed, imagining the shocked hikers observing the muddy babysitters on the mountain.

As I suspected early on, Denise and Nicole carry the literacy traditions within the family -- at least in the sense of the print literacies. What I did not at first realize was the extent of the other literacies which Eric -- and his father -- have. Eric has not just a family culture, but he has a male culture from his experiences with male relatives "up New Hampshire." That is where he truly feels he belongs, and that is where he develops his mechanical and building literacies. That is where much of his discourse pattern comes from -- he's being socialized into the vocabulary of vehicles and tools and the outdoor and the behaviors of outdoor work and play in the company of men -- a very caring company.

Eric's home culture, particularly his rural "up north" culture, values performance and self-sufficiency over explication. On the surface, his family might appear to be "typical" middle class in Newbridge, but a deeper look uncovers ways of operating that differ from the school's. Eric is labeled learning disabled by the school, but perhaps the deficit lies not with him, but in the ways institutions view children, lumping them together and stating what is appropriate knowledge,
particularly in literate and mathematical realms, while ignoring particularities of family cultures and backgrounds and overlooking what other literacies children do have.

Work and Identity

Beth Worth worked at identifying children's interests and modes of learning. Her themes of valuing diversity and respecting each other underlay all the activities and interactions in the classroom. Beth was eager to hear what I learned from visiting children at home.

Beth had heard about Eric's sled, and she knew that Denise Eldredge had told me, "Eric likes to work." He not only raked leaves and shoveled snow, but he loved to help his mother wash windows and vacuum. (Denise had laughed when she told me he immediately wanted to try the vacuum cleaner she got for Christmas.) Both Beth and I had noticed how much Eric had enjoyed the hands-on activities which were part of the Native American study early in the school year. His group had made tipis out of sticks and leather. Ramon had loved the project, too, and had grabbed much attention because of his constant busy-ness -- looking for additional materials, taking the tipi apart to build a fire and put beds inside, announcing his ideas to everyone. Eric had been much more self-contained, but he had clearly enjoyed himself.

Beth tried to provide opportunities for hands-on projects for what she called "kinesthetic learners" like Eric and Ramon, but it was difficult as the class burgeoned to include twenty-eight students. Even with a student teacher, it was hard to supervise the workshop area, so the children were restricted in their use of the tools in
the drawer. Ramon loved cutting and crafting with paper, which opportunities were relatively easy to provide (especially because Ramon barrelled ahead and took the initiative on his own), but woodworking projects which Eric would enjoy were another story. Beth and I brainstormed ways to do them -- get some parents to help students build toy chests for the classroom as a weekend project; invite small groups to build sculptures out of miscellaneous materials -- but with all the other things going on, we never translated the ideas into reality. Instead, Beth looked for other small ways to recognize Eric's expertise and to involve him in activities he liked.

First, she told him he was in charge of staplers. No one else was allowed to fill them or to fix them. I was disappointed that the task would not stretch his thinking, but that was not Beth's purpose. She wanted to give Eric a chance to contribute to the operation of the room in a genuine way. In all the remaining months of school, Eric conscientiously kept the staplers ready and unjammed them whenever necessary. There were other small tasks that he took on by his own initiative. After a class party, Eric enjoyed helping clean up and even vacuumed sometimes. One day, another teacher organized a clean-up of the school yard, and Eric happily came to tell me he'd been picked to help rake. (He'd even asked Ms. Worth to volunteer his services, because he had enjoyed the work last year.) Eric started to come in to the classroom early instead of waiting with the others in the schoolyard. Beth told me, "If it were anyone else, I wouldn't allow it, but he took the initiative to come in and I want to encourage that." He helped her around the room, and one day he asked if he could be in charge of lunch money.
Lunch money was one of the major classroom jobs. The person who did it in Beth's room had to go to the other children one-by-one, find out what they wanted for lunch, take their money, record their lunch choices and payment in one of five categories: 90 cents (full lunch), 40 cents (reduced lunch), F (free lunch), 25 cents (milk) or C (cold lunch), and make change. Eric got the job. Sometimes Carlos helped him. Eric told me he knew how to do the job because he "watched Joe," who'd had the job before him. "Plus I already know how." Eric went to the children one by one to get their money. He came back to Carlos, who was seated at his desk, and told him what to write down: "Dave. Put 'he owes.'" Carlos wrote '90 owe' and circled it in the column beside Joe's name. On the desk next to Carlos was a box of money, which both boys used to make change. Eric whispered to himself as he figured out what Mei deserved for change. Today she paid them $2 for two days, so she needed 20 cents change. He figured it out and went on to the next child. What a contrast to his performance on math worksheets!

These were such small things, unrelated to the formal curriculum (though the lunch money was certainly a real-world math lesson -- and what a contrast between Eric's investment on that compared to his performance on math worksheets!), and I wondered why Eric enjoyed them so much. Then I realized that they were real work. They all involved activity -- fixing, vacuuming, approaching classmates one by one. (Interestingly, when Eric did the lunch count, he circulated around the class, collected the money, and figured out how much change to give, but he enlisted Carlos to record the information. As Eric moved around the room, Carlos was sedentary, moving
only his pencil.) Beth believed Eric's work gave him a sense of contributing and belonging, a "handle on the class."

In her plea for education based on caring relations, Nel Noddings says, "If legal structures were amended to make real work possible for students in schools, we could make many suggestions," and she proposes "regular service activities" such as work with a "custodial master" to "keep the physical surroundings clean and comfortable" and work outdoors, in the kitchen, in offices, in classrooms, and in the community. "The emphasis would be on how the skills developed contribute to competence in caring, and not on the skills for vocational ends." Eric, sometimes with Beth Worth's help, created simple work situations for himself, and as Beth said, "He finds his place here by working and making a real contribution." Activities like that, which were similar to the kinds of work Eric does at home, helped him to bring some outside strengths to school and increased his self-confidence and positive attitude toward school.

There were occasions when Eric brought that self-confidence and investment to schoolwork -- preparing puppets, for example, or writing the seasonal poems with Daryl and Carlos. Those activities invariably grew out of small group projects in which the children had set all or many of the tasks. They then negotiated with each other and worked hard. Real relationships were central to such tasks -- interactions in which the children were working together for something, making contributions which would be valued in the culture of their class.
Merging the Cultures

Near the end of the year, Beth reported to me that Eric seemed much happier and more involved in school. For the first time in the year, he willingly read an original piece to the whole class -- a poem he wrote with Ramon. He also worked hard on a research report as part of a science unit on animals. Beth chuckled when she commented, "I think it's great that Eric picked beavers to study. They're like him -- such workers." Eric's partner, Mark, was absent for several days, so Eric did much of the research on his own, and Beth said, "He really got into it. I was really proud of him." The teacher or student teacher helped him make webs about what he learned on each of several topics, then he and Mark wrote drafts based on those webs. Beth noticed that they worked hard and were among the first to finish. "Eric wanted to get to the hands-on part," Beth laughed..."You know, illustrating and assembling the book." As always, he appreciated a product, and he knew this one was good. He felt comfortable about his place in the class -- a full, contributing member.

Eric and I had always had a slightly problematic relationship. Though Eric had come to me with stories or with queries about my recording equipment and sometimes used me as a resource to help him with his work, he had resisted direct questioning and sometimes seemed downright uncomfortable having me nearby, especially at his home. If I felt he was uneasy, I withdrew and left him alone. I learned by watching him or by trading brief stories; I don't remember any extended conversations. (The demonstration of the sled shows one occasion on which I pushed for information, but it can hardly be called a fluid conversation). I had hoped to visit his home workshop while he and his Dad were working together, but Russell
Eldredge said no. He told me, "Just imagine if I was doing a project about food, and I said, 'Okay, next time you have a dinner party, I want to come by and watch everybody eat.' " He said, "Denise and I understand what you're doing, but Eric is just a kid [and doesn't quite understand all this watching]." Though the family had been generous with time and information, I was still an outsider -- an observer much more than a participant in their family -- and the lines were drawn outside the workshop. I was not part of that culture. I assured Russell that I understood and did not want to make either Eric or him uncomfortable. I resigned myself to never seeing the workshop.

Then, on an evening in May, I went to the Eldredge home to share with them some of what I'd learned about Eric. Russell came up from the workshop to join Denise and me at the kitchen table, and our talk was just winding down when Eric and Nicole came in from riding their bikes. I gave Eric a gift of some wood and other materials to make a model car. Then, since I'd misplaced some photos, I asked if I could take another picture of the sled. Instead of bringing it upstairs, Russell said, "Wanta come down and do it?"

Nicole, Eric, Russell, and I wound our way down the narrow stairs. Once there, to my delight, they invited me to see the workshop. In the far corner of the basement, it was a small room filled with seven or eight power tools. A light film of sawdust covered the floor. Eric eagerly showed me each tool, naming them as he pointed one by one. Nicole picked up a block of wood with a key shape etched into it, "See what I'm working on?" (I hadn't known she was included.) Russell showed me a chair leg he had recently made to replace a broken one. He looked for a sketch
he'd made to help himself, but couldn't find it. He said, "I'm tryin' to get Eric to make drawings of things he wants to do -- plans. He hasn't done it yet." Yes, I thought. He could do more complex projects if he didn't have to hold all the details in his head at once. Drawing as a thinking tool...of course. Another literacy to explore.

Though I didn't join in as Eric built in the workshop, I was pleased to have seen their space. The same week, I stopped in at school one day. I accompanied Eric to the resource room, where the teacher had asked him and the other boys to look up their misspelled words in dictionaries or phonetic spellers. Eric wanted to write that he had "screwed up" the gears on his bike, but he didn't know how to spell "screwed." He astonished me by finding the spelling and correcting it on his paper so fast that I had no idea what page he'd turned to. "How did you figure that out so fast?" I asked him. He grinned at me, turned to a page in the speller, and showed me. "See --'screwdriver.' I took off this part (putting his fingers around 'driver' and put 'ed' on that part)." "How did you know the word, screwdriver? It's a much longer word." "I saw it in my mind." "You saw it?" "Yeah, you know, like at Sears, they have these screwdriver kits. I see them there all the time, and the word "screwdriver" is on them."

So Eric was sometimes aware of his own process. I felt as though this was a major breakthrough. I was used to shrugs and "I don't know." Eric had let me inside his head; he actually told me what he was thinking and visualizing. A few minutes later, he told me he knew the word "birthday" because he had seen it last Sunday on his cousin's birthday button. Later that day, when I asked him what was in his mind
as he worked on his beaver report, he resisted at first, then rolled his eyes as if to say, "Oh, Lady, do your questions never cease?" Then he answered. "I see a beaver, okay. It's about this big (he put his hands out in front of him to show the size) and about this thick." He looked at me with amusement. Though I knew I'd never sit beside Eric at a bonfire, I felt I'd finally come a little bit closer.

Those few interactions about Eric's thoughts were small instances, surely, but if Eric was able to verbalize them now, why was he not able to verbalize them before? Beth claimed that Eric (and Kelly, too) had become more reflective because of my questioning of them. That may have contributed. But Beth also believed that Eric's participation improved because he felt part of the community. "I really work at creating a class culture," she said. The class culture would not replicate or replace the culture Eric participates in with his family "up New Hampshire." But recognizing what was important to him had helped him find his place. In that process he improved his relationships with both his teacher and with me. He had made some curriculum gains, too, but I regretted that he was not yet a full member of the literate community. There were so many things we had yet to try: more science and other hands-on projects; reading apprenticeships of various kinds. We'd pass on what we'd learned to both the family and next year's teacher. But I regretted that Eric would likely face mismatched communication in any new classroom and would have to build a relationships in a new classroom culture all over again.
CHAPTER SIX

KELLY: SEEKING CONNECTIONS

An "Average" Child

Getting to Know Kelly

Even without knowing her name, I'd have guessed that Kelly McCormack came from an Irish heritage. A tall child, she had thick, coppery-red hair and a freckled face with a turned-up nose. Usually her hair was pulled back at her neck and draped down her back, but sometimes she wore it in a pony tail higher on her head or in a French braid. I liked it best, though, when she left her hair long. It was shiny and beautiful. But that wasn't Kelly's favorite style, because it bounced behind her as she played tag on the playground and it sometimes flew into her eyes -- an inconvenience for Kelly, who liked to be active. She enjoyed roller skating, ice skating, and other outdoor games, and she played in the city recreational leagues for girls -- basketball in the winter and softball in the spring. Her energy frequently led her into trouble and led to family stories about her as "an accident waiting to happen." Kelly told or wrote stories about cutting her foot at the beach, scraping her arm on the monkey bars, and breaking her front tooth, which had happened more than once; the tooth was still chipped, waiting to be permanently repaired when she was older.
I chose Kelly as one of my chief informants partly because she chose me.

Even on the first days of school when I situated myself on the periphery of the class, Kelly would come by as I was sitting on the couch. She wanted to read with me; she asked for help with her spelling; she requested that I check her math answers. Though she didn't misbehave or call out for attention as Ramon did, she seemed to need a lot of attention and reassurance from adults. Like a pesky puppy that's perpetually underfoot, she seemed to be always at my elbow.

Kelly interested me because she was what teachers often call an "average" student. She did her work, but it was not distinctive for either its strengths or its weaknesses. She was a poor speller, but she knew her math facts. She participated in small groups, but seldom offered anything to large class discussions. The first days of school, she seemed to lack confidence -- her face was guarded and unsmiling, her motions tentative -- but despite her unease, she made overtures to the other children, just as she made overtures to me. She was the sort of child who adjusts and gets by.

One of my first long interactions with Kelly occurred in the third week of school during Independent Reading time. Kelly approached me. "Will you read with me? I can't read to myself." She showed me a small reference book on the Chippewa Indians that she had started the day before. I agreed, but first I rummaged in my backpack for some more paper for my notetaking. "Oh no," I realized, "I forgot to bring extra paper." "I have some," Kelly said, and she quickly retrieved some looseleaf paper from her desk. "Take as much as you want. I have a lot. They had packs of 100 for 39 cents, so I bought a lot. At Walgreen's." I mentally noted the hint of consumer literacy, and accepted Kelly's offer.
As we settled down on chairs in the meeting area, with our backs warmed by the sun streaming in the window, we talked about how tired we both were that day. "My mother had to yell at me about twenty times to wake me up," Kelly told me. Not until a couple of weeks later did I learn that she frequently gets up as early as 5:30 to help her older sister with her paper route before breakfast.

Kelly read aloud to me a section about the Chippewa's fur trading. I noted that she often used her finger to follow the words and that she made some miscues: "scared" for "sacred" (which she read incorrectly even when I asked her to reread, but which she corrected when I told her it meant "holy"), "Dult" for "Duluth," "treaties" with a long /i/ sound near the end. When I asked her about the latter, Kelly claimed she did not know what a treaty was. Once, she ignored a period which changed the meaning of the paragraph, but when she reread (at my suggestion), she saw and corrected her error. Despite the miscues, Kelly comprehended the material and interacted with the text. She read the captions under the pictures and commented on them. She told me, "Know what I think was weird here?" Then she flipped back several pages to an explanation of an art form which required that the artists bite designs into the wood. "They must have had a lot of splinters in their tongues!" she exclaimed. Once, she spontaneously and accurately summed up a long sentence in her own words.

Despite miscues, Kelly had good comprehension and she used some positive reading strategies (questioning, looking back, reading captions), so I was surprised that she felt she couldn't read on her own. She told me that when she reads silently she hears every word in her mind.
I got a clue about Kelly when she asked for help filling out her reading chart. To summarize the day's reading, she identified that she needed to "start with the first chapter, and put a few sentences about each part," but even knowing what she should do, she seemed to need to discuss it with someone to be sure she was on the right track. The same thing happened about a week later as Kelly was rewriting a piece about her friend Deanna. As the result of a conference with the student teacher, Kelly realized she had two sentences beginning with "I said" and that she needed to change one. She wasn't sure which one and asked me what she should do. I suggested she reread the piece to see what she thought, and she easily made the decision to remove the second one. She then asked, "How do you spell flower?" Before I responded, she continued, "F - l - o - w - e - r?" thus answering her own question, though she waited for my nod before writing the word. Then she asked me several more questions about spelling and editing decisions, which she answered herself. I noticed this pattern whenever I helped her with writing, reading, or math. If she could do it, I wondered, why did she have so little confidence in herself?

I soon learned more about Kelly's lack of confidence and apparent discomfort in the class -- and also why she was taller than the others. She was new, and she was older. She had attended Lincoln School through second grade, then switched to a parochial school for the past two years, where she had done third grade twice. "I hated it there," she told me. Now that she was back at the public school, she was a year behind the children she had known in the primary grades, and she worried not only about being with new friends, but about being teased for staying back. She also had the belief that she wasn't very smart.
To Kelly's relief, the other children didn't seem to know about her staying back -- or if they did, they didn't care -- and within a few weeks, she was intermingling happily with her classmates. I watched one day as a bunch of girls gravitated to the large workshop table during writing time. A few days earlier, Laura had read a poem which had been very well-received by the class. It was called "Ribbons."

Ribbons, ribbons, in my hair.  
Ribbons, ribbons, everywhere.  
Ribbons are a colorful sight.  
Ribbons are oh so bright.  
There are so many different colors.  
They are the prettiest colors I've ever seen.  
They are sparkely, darkely,  
colored with black,  
And other colors, too.  
My favorite color ribbons are pink, purple, and blue.

Now, Janette, Michaela, and Kelly were helping Laura prepare a final, published copy of the poem to put into her Best Book. They had discovered a rack of about a dozen spools of ribbon in the workshop, and their conversation went like this.

Michaela (as she held up a ribbon): This would look good.

Kelly: No, in her poem she said they said they were sparkely, remember?

Michaela: Sparkely, darkely.

Kelly (as she chose a purple ribbon and clipped it from the spool): There you go! Laura could put it on like this. (She formed a bit of ribbon into a bow). Just cut off the bottom so it would fit...

Michaela: She could glue it.

Kelly: No, staple it. Glue will take off the back.

Michaela: You'll have a staple on the other side of the paper then.
Kelly went on adjusting the ribbon as Laura watched for a moment and the other two girls left the area. Laura decided to use glue and she kept the shiny purple ribbon.

I noted Kelly's critical thinking in that interchange. Without having heard Laura's poem in several days, Kelly remembered important details about the ribbon. Not just any ribbon would do; it had to be the right texture and shininess and color. Further, Kelly helped Laura figure out how to form it and lay it on the page. She appeared to have a sense of design, a good visual memory and aptitude. Kelly was interpreting the poem, translating it into the medium of art and design.

I also noted how comfortable Kelly was negotiating with the other girls. Unlike the tentativeness she had shown in the first days of school, she readily joined in to offer her ideas, even when she disagreed with someone else's suggestion. The others listened to her and considered what she had to say. In short, she was one of the group.

However, Kelly's acceptance by the children did not necessarily improve her confidence in her abilities as a student. And it did not mean she was any less drawn to me and the attentions I could give her. I wondered about Kelly and others like her -- those children who may not be as noticeable as the ones we label "talented and gifted" or "special needs," the ones who drift through school doing acceptable work, but often with little enthusiasm or belief in themselves. What strengths and literacies do some of those children have? How do the reading, writing, and learning they do in school relate to the reading, writing, and learning they do at home? In Kelly's case, I already had seen a hint of consumer literacy and perhaps a sense of design.
Because she seemed such an "average" student and because she was so eager to talk to me, I thought Kelly would make a good case study. When I met her mother, Carol McCormack, at Open House, I asked her permission, and we agreed to talk.

Problems of a Child in the Middle

On our first visits, Carol told me Kelly would be "a good candidate because of all her problems. She's a middle child and doesn't always get as much attention. Plus her older sister is such a success at everything, she doesn't have the confidence. Kelly used to be chubby and she's still concerned about her weight. She's so self-conscious of it."

It struck me that Kelly was a child in the middle in another way besides birth order. She also liked to be literally in the middle of things, particularly in interactions with adults. In a small group, she jockied to sit next to the student teacher, and she often approached Ms. Worth or me with stories of her weekend, as well as requests for help. Carol noted, "Kelly is our little cling-on with adults. She's afraid to miss something...she catches everything, listens and takes it all in."

Carol also told me that Kelly had a tough time the past two years at her other school. "She hated it there, absolutely hated it, and she had the same teacher for two years. But she's thrilled to be back in public school. She loves school now."

Carol McCormack decided to participate in the study, saying, "I want to do this for Kelly. The attention is good for her." I soon came to enjoy the long mornings Carol spent talking to me in the living room of her third floor apartment. It felt like talking to an old friend. As Carol told me about her daughter, I learned more

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about both of Kelly's parents, who were divorced, and I came to understand some of the ways the family and its culture influenced Kelly. I also learned more about Kelly's past experiences in school.

Coffee with Carol McCormack

The McCormacks' apartment is from the same era as the Eldredge and Dumont homes. Carol comes down the stairs to unlock the door when I ring, then leads me up two flights of narrow stairs and though the entry, which is chock full of stuff -- coats and roller skates, boxes of stored items, and a bureau piled high with games. The apartment itself is informally but comfortably furnished, and it's always neat when I come. I suspect Carol picks up and vacuums in honor of my visits. A couch and chair, a coffee table, and a stereo in the living room are presided over by two caged birds, whose screeches occasionally punctuate our conversations.

A second room opens from the first. It is dominated by a large television and two couches which face the t.v. Tables in the corners are laden with papers -- newspapers and mail and school notices -- and with sewing projects. On the walls are embroidered sayings about friendship and a knickknack shelf with miniature teddy bear figurines. The room was designed to be a dining room, but now the china cupboard is full of videotapes. One day, Carol showed me the collection -- a couple hundred videotapes of t.v. movies and documentaries, especially science shows. Most belong to Carol's boyfriend, Joe. It's hard to tell which video is which, because the labels are on the tapes inside their boxes, so Carol is currently trying to label them all. She also has a rolodex on which she's listing the video's titles and their numbers -- a sort of index.
"Would you like some coffee?" Carol calls over her shoulder as she heads for the kitchen. She's wearing her "very special mum" t-shirt and well-worn light blue sweat pants. Her hair is in a single braid, slightly disheveled.

"The usual. Just half a cup," I reply. I settle myself on the overstuffed sofa, set my tape recorder on the coffee table, and take out my clipboard, making myself at home. I've only been here a few times, but I felt comfortable from the first visit, probably because Carol is so casual and open.

Carol returns with the coffee. "I want to cut down," she confides. "I'm addicted to it. I put the coffee pot on a timer at night, so when I get up I can go immediately to my coffee."

She places two steaming glass mugs on the coffee table, then sits cross-legged on the chair across from me and picks up her needlework. "See?" She holds up a red sweatshirt with a cross-stitched teddy bear on the front. "This one's for Annie."

I admire the handiwork. Carol is cross-stitching designs onto sweatshirts for her three girls and her nieces and nephews for Christmas. Last year she made homemade gifts for all her adult relatives.

"Does Kelly do cross stitch, too?" I ask.

"She did for awhile. My friend and I had gone to Ames Store. They were having a close-out of kits for 25 cents apiece. We each bought four or five dollars worth. We figured, even if we just used the frames, it would be worth it. The kids saw them and wanted one, so six months ago, I gave each girl one. But they lost interest in it after a day or two. I suppose if we sat and sewed, Kelly might sit with
us. My friend and I used to sit and sew and work on ideas for gifts. But my friend works now."

Carol used to work, too, but now she's a full-time student at the local college, studying for a nursing degree. She has told me she misses working, even though it was difficult with three young children at home -- each one only a year or so apart. "I worked for sanity," she laughs. "Six weeks after each baby, I worked. When I was at work, I took better care of myself. I looked forward to it -- the adult conversation." When the girls were small, Carol gave up the bank teller job she liked in order to work nights at a donut shop so that her ex-husband could come and care for the children while she worked. She and Kevin were divorced when Annie, the youngest, was one and a half. That was eight years ago. Now Annie is nine, Kelly ten, and Maureen, eleven. They're in third, fourth, and sixth grade.

"Kevin and I have a better relationship now than when we were married. We have good communication. I've already mentioned to him about the school conferences that are coming up and he put it on his calendar. We'll go together."

"That's great that you go to the conferences together," I say.

"I worked hard to get to this point," Carol replies. "Still, it's not always easy. He doesn't come over as often as the girls would like, and I tell them, 'I can't answer for him. He doesn't know what you feel if you don't tell him.'"

Carol has put down her sewing and is talking with her hands. She pauses and picks up her cigarette. After taking a puff, she holds it down beside her so the smoke won't come toward me.
"Usually after a school conference, Kevin comes back here and we discuss with the girls one by one -- what the teachers said. But one time Kelly suddenly screamed at Kevin, 'Why did you get a divorce?' Kevin felt bad. I did, too. It came out of left field, but it was a release for her. She asked, 'How come this? How come that?' Maybe she thought we'd get back together. But we said no. As they get older, they'll see more things on their own, draw their own opinions and conclusions."

She takes another drag on her cigarette. "I've tried and tried to get Kevin to realize how important it is to the girls that he see them, go to their school events. It's so important to them. But he can't always make it. He works a couple of jobs -- manages a store and works in another retail store at night -- and he tells them, 'I have to keep a roof over your head.' In some ways, they understand. Ninety-nine percent of the time, I'm there, even basketball games. I go and take them, pick them up. They take me for granted. They assume I'll be there."

"I don't hide anything from their father," Carol tells me. "I mean, major things. Like there was an incident last summer. Maureen went with an older neighbor down to the park and I sent Kelly and Annie to spy on her. What's she up to? There she was, an eleven year old kissing a sixteen year old. I sent them back for Maureen and called Kevin and he was here when she got back."

"Wow!" I react. "He was here before she even got back?" Carol nods and goes on to a related story. "Now it's make-up that Maureen's into. I don't approve of it, I don't like it, and if I find out...! Maureen was putting it on at school, and I found out, and she said, 'Don't tell Daddy, don't tell Daddy.' I said, 'Of course I will. We don't care what anyone else does or what their parents say. We will decide.' "

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I express amazement that she and Kevin can pull off such a unified front when they're divorced. "We don't agree on everything," Carol acknowledges. "Like Kevin says they can't get their ears pierced until they're sixteen and I tell him that's too extreme. He came and we discussed it. We agreed on their tenth birthday -- a compromise." I continue to be impressed with the communication this takes, even though I know there have been rough edges in the relationships. Carol has told me how hurt the girls were when Kevin would miss visitation appointments when they were younger. Even now, they'd like to see him more. Kelly recently called him up to help her with her spelling goals and was very pleased that he came one evening to help her with her homework. But he hasn't been able to come regularly. One night recently I planned to come while he was here, but he was unable to make it due to a death of a relative.

"When we were married, it was tough," Carol says. "It gets back to the way we were brought up. I'm at one extreme, he's at another extreme. Sometimes I'll be out here," she says, stretching her arm out to one side, "and he's out here" (she stretches her other arm out the other way) "and we can't meet in the middle."

"There are different rules...in Kevin's house than there are here. Like they know when they are with their father they are not allowed to watch MTV in his home...In my house, it's not so much that I approve of it, but I don't tell them no..But they know they're not even allowed to attempt to put it on [at his house]. He just doesn't approve."

Kevin contributes financially, plus the family qualifies for housing money from the state. "Kelly wanted to take instrument lessons so bad -- something we
cannot afford. So we made a deal. If the school picked her as one of the ten kids that they loan instruments to, that's fine, great, but she must understand that there's three of them in this family. It costs $75 plus the book plus insurance...That's $125 each. We really can't afford it. They ask for things -- 'Can I get this? It's only 59 cents.' But it's times three."

We chat for a while about how expensive it is to bring up kids. Carol says, "My kids are very money conscious. Money's always been tight. But they want for nothing. They have shoes on their feet, coats on their back, food in the storm." She tells me, "Maureen has a paper route so she earns her own money. She's working for a $5000 scholarship from the newspaper -- if she does it for three years. She's done a year and a half already, so we're halfway."

"You have to get up early every day, then," I observe. "You don't get a day off, not even Sunday."

"Not even Christmas," Carol replies. "Every day."

She continues, "Kelly wants to get her own route, too. She and Annie can take it over when Maureen finishes her three years -- but the newspaper has changed the deal. It takes four years now to get the scholarship."

"So they plan to go to college then?" I ask.

"I want my girls to do good in school, to go on to college. Not necessarily dorm life -- I don't see them going away from home -- but the experience of college. When I was in high school, it was the last place I wanted to be and I graduated by the skin of my teeth. I didn't get involved in groups -- pep club or debate or dance. It was the cliquers who were in that type of group. Other kids were in newspaper or
homecoming queen. Wouldn't that be something, if one of mine could be that! I'll hope they'll do that kind of activity, that kind of function. I would give anything to do high school over again, take college courses, enjoy myself, attempt to apply myself, then go to college, enjoy the single or college life. Get an education and money first, then think about settling down. But hindsight is twenty-twenty. I hope they don't end up in the same situation as me. It isn't easy. Not that I wouldn't support them whatever they choose."

"They see you now as a student, with homework and everything," I observe.

"Yes, they see me doing homework, typing papers, going to the library. And they see me kicking myself for not doing it years ago. They see what's involved, how hard it is for me to go back to school. I'm hoping the girls can not make the same mistake I made and that they won't put it off for fifteen years like I did. Their father tells them, 'You're going to college. Get a good education so you can get a good job and earn good money.' He wants to give the kids all that he can't give them now."

Carol and I talk about Kelly as a student and about how she hates to read.

"You know," Carol says, "they used to read when they were younger, a lot more often. Like when they weren't in school."

"Before school?" I ask. "In preschool, you mean? Look at picture books and stuff?"

"Right," Carol says, "and more so, like even first and second grade...They all went to Head Start...which was, say, at three and four years old, before they had their first year of kindergarten...Kevin tended to read with them a lot more when he took them [on visitation days] only because they were at an age he didn't know what to do
with them...which didn't necessarily keep their attention." Carol didn't read much to them. "I didn't necessarily always have the time. I was working, too, nights."

Several times in our conversation, Carol talks about how happy Kelly is in school this year. "She had such a bad experience in the other school; she just couldn't do anything right...[The teacher] told us three weeks after Kelly started that she was keeping Kelly back..."

I was incredulous. "So [Kelly] knew from the beginning of the year?"

"That's right. It was just a fiasco...At the time we thought we were doing the right thing...I think public school is the best thing that's ever happened to [Kelly]...She seems 100% different in the short amount of time in every aspect of her life. Her whole attitude and the way she dresses and takes care of...everything! Everything, and it has just amazed me...I'm just so glad she went back to public school because she's just so comofortable with herself, and so...she's not at conflict with herself anymore...She doesn't seem to be under that pressure."

"Was it very quiet at the other school?"

"You couldn't speak a word without putting your hand up. Very disciplined. Even standing in line to go down to the bathroom...it was very uniform. You weren't allowed to speak in line. If you did you were reprimanded for it. That probably has a lot to do with why she has changed and improved so much, because she feels -- she's in a more comfortable environment, she can speak her mind and not be afraid to do so. I think the classrooms are set up better...they don't lump all the kids together into one group and expect the ones that are doing real good to be in the same group
with the ones that maybe need a little bit of extra help, and the ones that are in the middle."

I explain that Beth doesn't use ability grouping, which Carol hadn't realized. But she explains her point: "I'm sure that Beth has made them all feel that however they read is just fine and dandy, that they're reading to the best of their ability, and that's all that matters."

"Okay, I see what you mean."

"Whereas, before, at her other school, I'm sure that Kelly probably cringed in her seat, hoping to God that the teacher didn't call on her to read, for fear of embarrassment and giggles. That plays a big part in it. She has become so comfortable in her surroundings."

I ask, "How do you see Kelly learning at home? For example, getting a new game. Kelly claimed to me the other day that she doesn't really read much of the directions. Maureen seems to be the one that figures them out and she learns from these other people..."

"She doesn't do it because she doesn't HAVE to. She's got the big sister comes along and says, 'Let me read that.' And within five minutes, Maureen will skim over it, read it, understand it and say, this is how you play. [Kelly's] never had to be the one to read it and decide. Or nine times out of ten it's a game that, even though it may be a new game to them, they've already played it at somebody else's house, so they already know how to play. They don't even bother with the directions."
We look at a folder of the children's school papers and report cards. There are many workbook pages, spelling and handwriting sentences, and tests from the past couple of years at the parochial school. I'm surprised to see that Kelly's report card for the second year of third grade (both years having been at the other school) was mostly B's. I ask about that. "I hadn't gotten the impression from talking to you or her that she did well there." Then I speculate out loud, "I think even though she did well the second year, she didn't feel good about it."

"She didn't feel good about it, and I don't feel that her report card reflects this either. It reflected a great improvement, but I don't feel as thought it was honest, and that's my personal, very biased opinion." Carol is implying that Kelly did better than the teacher gave credit for. "It was the same teacher. The second time around it was easier, because "One, she had the [Chapter One] tutor." Carol explains that Kelly would meet the tutor after school at the library, and that she enjoyed working with her. "It was something she looked forward to every week," Nancy says. "It was two hours that she got to spend with this person all by herself...It was one on one and she enjoyed it."

She pulls out a page of work from the folder. Quite different from the workbook pages, it looked like advertisements. "This is from the Chapter One tutor?" I ask.

Carol nods. "Like a sale ad," she explains. "Like you could read...certain things were on sale and how much they were on sale for...see what I mean? She coincided reading along with the math. Then you can see here where she added off to the side. It says, 'How much would two packages of the vanilla cremes cost?'"
I tell Carol about a similar project the children have recently done in the fourth grade and how much Kelly seemed to like it. We talk about how those activities are meaningful to Kelly; she's used to running errands to buy a few items at the grocery store.

As the morning winds on, one topic leads to another. Carol tells stories of her own parochial school education and notes how the Lincoln School is different. "I've been in the classroom and I saw how the desks are arranged, and there are sections at the side with chairs, maybe a couch or a beanbag chair...When I went to school, everybody was in rows. All the kids looked in the same direction and all were at the same level. There was no Chapter One or different reading groups -- just one big group."

She talks about her memories of her relationship with her mother and her desire for better communication with her own daughters. "I sit and touch and hug and put my arm around the girls while we watch t.v. I don't want my girls to grow up in an uncommunicative environment. I did many of the things I did [in high school] because I didn't have good communication at home. I have a much better relationship with myself and the girls than I had with my mother...Of course, there are other things I do want to do like my mother." Like Denise Eldredge, Carol notes how schools are different now and children show less respect for their elders. "Nowadays you hear of kids saying stuff to their teachers, being disrespectful. My kids scream at me sometimes. I'd never think to speak to my parents like that. Maybe it's having a one-parent family as opposed to two parents. Maybe it's society
We talk about Carol's favorite soap opera and last night's television shows. Before long, we're both having second cups of coffee and soon the pot is empty. Carol and I both look up as the door opens. It's Joe, Carol's boyfriend. He's a full-time student, too, taking even more courses than she is, and he's here between classes. He spends most of his time here and is a regular part of the girls' life, though he does not appear to have the same say about the girls' upbringing as Kevin does.

Joe's surprised to see me. "I thought you were coming early this morning," he exclaims. "I did," I reply, looking at the clock. It's after noon. "I have to get moving," I say, and I gather up my stuff. Now Maureen is coming in from the back door. It's a half day of school today; I'd forgotten that. "Here, Mom," she says, handing her mother a school notice. "There's some new laws you have to know about." Carol glances at the notification regarding medications in school and says she'll read it later.

Kelly and Annie will be home in about half an hour from the elementary school, and I regret I have to go. But I have an appointment elsewhere, so Carol and I agree to talk again. Then Maureen shows me to the front door and down the stairs, chattering the whole time. "Guess what, Mrs. Voss, at school today, there was this assembly..." She's sharp-eyed and vivacious, and I can see why Kelly may sometimes defer to her older sister. But I suspect they are more alike than different. Kelly may be overshadowed by Maureen's personality and confidence, but she has personality of her own. She just lacks the confidence.
Kelly at Home

My observations of Kelly at school, combined with my initial conversations with her mother, left me with several impressions of Kelly's literacies, impressions which I wanted to confirm by talking and interacting with Kelly outside of school.

Like Eric, Kelly claimed that she never read at home. Though she didn't think of herself as a reader, she could read fairly well, and I wondered how she used print literacies in her daily life. Already I'd seen evidence of a strong consumer literacy for a ten-year old. I remembered the time that she offered me a snack ("Want some sugar wafers? My mother got them on sale for 99 cents") and the time she gave me the notebook paper she'd bought. Her mother had spoken of her children's awareness of money, and I knew Kelly often went to the store for her mother. Print literacy, as well as real-world mathematical awareness, might figure into that consumer literacy somehow.

I had also discovered that television and videos were a major source of entertainment in the McCormack household. In conversations at school, Kelly referred to television shows often -- frequently situation comedies, but sometimes information from documentaries. And I knew from both her and her mother that she watched movies and t.v. specials on videotapes. I wanted to know more about Kelly's media literacy. I remembered, too, Kelly's artistic sense when she had helped Laura choose the right ribbon to decorate her poem. How did that fit in?

I was curious about Kelly's interactions with her sisters and friends outside of school. I knew from all her stories about injuries that she liked to be active, but I
wondered what other things the children played after school. Did Kelly use print literacies -- or other literacies -- in her play?

I visited Kelly numerous times after school. I sat on the sidelines as she played board games in the afternoon with her sisters and friends, spent a comfortable evening with her family watching television, and made "shrinky-dink" bracelets from a craft kit one day after school. I went to a Saturday morning basketball game and walked with her to her weekly church school class. Once, I accompanied her and Maureen on Maureen's early morning paper route. A couple of times Kelly came to my house and used my computer.

I found Kelly accessible and easy to be with, and she seemed comfortable with me and pleased to have me around. My observations confirmed and fleshed out some of the impressions I had about Kelly's various literacies, starting with her awareness and use of print.

**Kelly's Print Literacy**

Several times I walked home from school with Kelly, accompanied by either her younger sister, Annie, or her neighbor and classmate, Jody. One day, not long after Christmas, I told Kelly as we left the school, "This afternoon I'd like to talk all the different ways you read and write at home. Maybe we can look around and see." Her immediate reaction was, "Oh, I don't read and write at home." I thought of that response as I walked the several blocks alongside her and Jody.

Kelly and Jody kept up a steady stream of chatter, swapping jokes learned from friends, telling stories about their classmates, recounting incidents at the middle school (as heard from their older sisters), or remembering funny things they did as
younger children. But they also read incidentally along the way. Jody pointed out "Merry Christmas" in the dust on the back of a sportscar, and as we approached the post box, Kelly said, "Oh, here, let's see if it's still there." She found what she was looking for -- a picture of a rabbit someone had scratched in, and then she read more of the graffiti there. The girls' conversation provided further evidence of their daily literacies. I learned about a tree house Jody and Kelly had made in a tree in Jody's yard and the blueprint they'd made before they built it (later Jody tried to find the blueprint for me, but couldn't find it.). Kelly showed me her notebook and told me where she bought it and how much it cost. The girls talked about the finer points of stylish clothing. (You can tell if it's an imitation B. U. M. sweatshirt if there are no periods after the initials.)

That afternoon, as we arrived at her apartment, Kelly reached into her school bag and handed her mother the Christmas story she'd written the day before. "That's good, Kelly," Carol said, taking a look at it.

Maureen and a cousin were sick and were lying bundled up on the couches watching Disney's *The Brave Little Toaster* on the VCR. Kelly pronounced the film "good" (she'd seen it at school in the past), but paid it little attention. Annie and another cousin were playing a keyboard in the kitchen, with a sheaf of music in front of them. In the living room, Kelly showed me the gifts she got for Christmas, and I noticed that as she explained one of the games to me, she read its package without realizing she was doing it. Then she and I looked around the room and brainstormed about the things she reads and writes. Her mother and Maureen joined in and added to the list, which we created in just a few minutes:
• the chalkboard (message board) -- writing or reading messages, playing school.
• order forms for selling Girl Scout cookies (names, phone numbers, total dollar amount)
• Stuff in a canvas Girl Scout bag:
  • Girl Scout handbook
  • Girl Scout notebook to write reminders to herself ("meeting tomorrow night")
  • Badge Book (she skimmed a page and summed up for me "what we're working on now")
  • note to herself ("Bring a bottle or can")
  • letter to Kris Kringle (a gift-giving partner; interestingly, it was in Maureen's handwriting. Kelly had asked her to write it for her.)
  • paper with the word "hot chocolate" (part of a game played at recent meeting; Kelly tells me her prize that night was a book, but she traded for a cosmetic case)
  • a tag on the bird cage which tells how to clean it
• Christmas cards
• phone messages (but Kelly says, "I never write anything down; I just tell my mother or Joe.)
• card she gave her mother for Mother's Day ("I picked it out myself.")
• Video Movie Guide
• T.V. Guide
• rolodex with videos they own ("It only tells 50 of the movies we have; you pull out the card to see what they are")
• homework
• local and city newspapers ("all I read is right under the picture to see what the picture's about")
• directions in some of mother's cross-stitch books
• words "Friends are Special" (on wall-hanging)
• phone book
For a child who claimed to never read, Kelly does a great deal of reading, certainly more than Eric, for example. But like Eric, much of Kelly's reading is incidental rather than consciously chosen; words on wallhanging and necklace are
just there, as are catalogues and brochures for browsing (Avon catalogue, Little League newsletter). Much of this reading is environmental print (packages, tee shirts, signs), and almost all of it is functional (directions for playing games, cooking, taking medicine). Kelly reads to help her cook, sew, play, or shop. She reads for information, and often the information she seeks is related to entertainment in other non-print media: words to songs, schedules of television shows, captions under pictures. The only examples of extended print which appear on this list are the book, Ramona, which Kelly had been given as a gift but had not read yet, and messages and letters to others-- including various interactions related to her Girl Scout activities.

The message-writing and reading functions relate to Kelly's strong desire for social connections. She also showed me a note she'd written to her friend, which had been returned unopened (Figure 6-1 on the next page). Its content attests to the emotion and purpose which inspired her to write.

Though Kelly can read and write in that she can not only decode and encode but can comprehend and interpret material, she does not willingly use reading and writing for as wide a range of purposes as some children, such as Janette, do. Almost all of Kelly's reading is embedded in other activities. Though she receives books as gifts, she does not choose reading as a recreational or pleasurable activity. Another time when I was visiting her home, Kelly brought an armload of books from her bedroom to show me. In the pile was a Nancy Drew book, some Babysitter Club books, Ramona, and a book about birds which Kelly opened to show me. "See, when we got the birds, we looked in here to find out what to feed them and stuff." Kelly said, "I have my own Bible from First Communion, too." As we talked, Kelly
Dear DeAnna,

I wish you would tell me why you are mad at me, because I think I didn't do anything wrong. So please tell me why you are mad at me.

Your friend,
Kelly

Figure 6-1  Kelly's Note to a Friend
stacked the books by size. When she came to the Babysitter Club book, she told me how she and her sisters babysit for a neighbor's mentally handicapped, grown daughter.

Kelly enjoyed owning all these books, but she had not read any of them all the way through. Though she had seen a link between the Babysitter Club book's content and her life, she still had not read the novel. She had used the bird book when she had a clear purpose. Even then, she did not use it by herself; the family had looked at it for information they needed. Togetherness seemed to a theme that was cropping up frequently -- Kelly's wish that her parents could still be together, her reliance on her sister, even her reading.

Kelly had told me delightedly about the books her grandmother gave her for Christmas: "You remember those babysitter club books she gave me last year that I showed you? Well, she gave me a whole set of Amelia Bedelia books this Christmas." Kelly read only one of them. Carol had told me how Kelly loved to order books from the Book Club at school, but that she never read them. The pleasure seemed to come from choosing them, filling out the slip to buy them, having them -- not from immersing herself in the stories or the information. Carol had said, "I wouldn't mind buying her ten books if I could afford them if she was going to read them, [but] they get tossed in the other room and you never see them again."

I once asked Kelly how she decides which book to read, and she replied, "I don't really read books. The Wayside School (which she read at school) is the first chapter book I ever finished. I usually only go half-way through. I never read endings. Or I just read the end to get an idea of what happened. Sometimes I read
the last chapter, then go back. But sometimes that spoils it, like On My Honor (a book the whole class was reading and discussing)." It appeared that she cared only about the plot, so if she could find out the ending, that was all that mattered to her.

I asked why she never finished books, and Kelly replied, "They sound boring. I just hate to read. I start them when I'm in a good mood or something." But she told me she did like Wayside School because it was funny. Later, her mother would comment that she thought another reason Kelly liked the book was that she had met the author at a school-related event. That gave it more meaning for her.

Kelly's Media Literacy: A Family Matter

Though Kelly didn't have clear criteria for choosing books, she did know how to choose television shows. She said she chose from previews and commercials (if they sound good") or "if my friends say it's good." She said, "I look at a TV Guide or my sister does and she reads it off what we can watch for this hour."

Kelly's favorite television show is Full House because "it's about kids and different things that happen to them. I like it with...[the character of] Jessie's wife, who just had twins. The little girl Michelle is jealous. She's not getting as much attention." Interestingly, Kelly chooses a show with characters that holds some similarity to her own family, and she speaks of a situation which she herself has experienced -- the desire for attention which is complicated by additional children in the house. Though the show is about a household headed by males -- a father and two uncles -- there are three girls whose conflicts and jealousies are played out in each episode, always with comforting -- albeit pat and predictable -- resolutions and expressions of affection. The themes in the show may play for Kelly the same role
that themes in fairy tales and novels play for some children, demonstrating some of
the conflicts people face and seeing them resolved in reassuring ways. Kelly's other
favorite shows share some of these elements. Out of this World is about an alien girl
adjusting to situations (Kelly mentioned that the character's father visited her on the
last episode -- again, a situation Kelly can identify with) and Beverly Hills 90210
"teaches you not to do certain things; you look at the lessons they teach you."

One evening I went to the McCormack's home to watch Full House with
Kelly, her sisters, and her mother. I brought a borrowed microphone, which I set up
on a stand, and there was lots of performing and laughing as first Maureen and then
Annie took turns singing into the mike. Kelly knew the words to the song they were
singing -- Wild One, and she joined in on the chorus, but she did not jump and
posture at the mike the way her sisters did. As the girls sang, Carol informed me,
"That song's about the Charles Stuart case." I asked Kelly if she knew that story
from the news of the previous year, and she said, "No."

"Yes, you do," her mother told her. "It was on 911 (a television show)."

"Oh, the guy who jumped off the bridge?" Kelly responded. She did know
the story, but the source of her information differed from what I'd expected.

We all settled on the couches and watched Jeopardy. Kelly said she wanted
to watch something else, but Carol replied, "We're gonna watch this. Your shows are
later." Kelly later said she didn't know any of the answers, so she didn't like the
show. But when "knitting" was the answer to a question on the show, Kelly
immediately linked that to her own experience. She told me that her grandmother
was teaching her to knit and showed me a sample. Similarly, the other girls
exclaimed whenever they heard information they could put into a personal context. (Maureen, for example, cried out, "We're learning about them in school," when "bunsen burners" were mentioned.) Carol often called out answers to the show's questions, while the girls chattered with me and commented on the contestants. They thought one of the players seemed conceited. At each break in the show, they hummed along with the theme song and the commercials.

Then it was time for *Full House.* "I'll be Becky," Maureen said, naming a character in the show. "I'll be D.J.," Kelly called out. The girls explained to me, "We say who we are before anybody else. Like we play that character." Her sisters having claimed the two favorite characters, Annie opted for three: "I'm Kimmy, Michelle, and Stephanie. Nobody else can be those." Once identifications with characters had been arranged, the girls said little else about them. The important thing was claiming the characters, nothing more. They settled in to enjoy the show.

The show was a repeat, so Kelly sometimes keyed me in, "Oh watch this part, this is so funny." When the credits came on in the beginning of the show, Kelly explained to me that the youngest girl is played by twins. That explains the actresses's four-part name, which is actually two names put together. I asked Kelly how she knew that. Maureen had read it in an article "somewhere" and had told her.

Kelly watched a lot of television. When I visited in the afternoon, the girls were apt to play games, but once Kelly said to me, "Know what I watch when I come home 'til 5 o'clock? Soap operas." The television was on at the time so Carol could watch her favorite soap opera and Kelly said, "See this guy?" She pointed to a character on screen, then indicated a woman. "They all thought she was dead; she
walked in when he was gonna marry someone else." Kelly gave me hints on soap operas: "You'll never know what's wrong unless you watch it for about a month."

Carol put in: "My friend downstairs watches different soap operas than I do, and it gets so confusing. The girls think I'm crazy for watching soap operas."

Kelly and her sisters watch a variety of things. Kelly likes Mr. Wizard, a show with sciences experiments, in the morning. The girls watch news, after-school specials which Carol feels are "beneficial for them," and occasionally videos for information, such as the tape about menstruation which Carol showed them. They also watch Joe's videotaped documentaries. Carol told me, "[Joe] doesn't record anything that's a sitcom other than if the kids or I ask him to. It's all educational or science-related." Joe explained to me, "I wanted to have a library of knowledge."

Carol, Joe, and Kelly have all said that Kelly likes science; perhaps Joe's videos have contributed to that interest.

Kelly told me: "I find it easier to watch than read. Books are big and long. It's easier to see a movie." I wondered, "Does a book give you anything a movie doesn't?" She said, "Not really. You could imagine a character wrong and get the story mixed up...imagine a character different than it really is."

That comment astonished me. Kelly saw television or movie versions as definitive and her own imagined interpretations of scenes and characters were "wrong" if they did not match the media version. She had no understanding of the different views individuals brought to their reading (or watching), and of people's varied responses to texts and visual media. She thought that what she saw on the screen must be the "right" way and her own visualizations of characters or scenes or
plots were off the mark. This attitude reminded me of younger children who have trouble telling the difference between fantasy and reality in stories. In Kelly's case, she seemed to believe that media was the authority.

That acceptance of media authority was not always the case, however. One day, Kelly showed me a page of *TV Guide*. She had been skimming the titles, captions, and tables. "In here they rate what's on, see?...Who do you think would rate higher?" She showed me the ratings chart for that evening's shows, then continued. "I think *Full House* would [rate higher], but it gets a B and *Home Improvements* gets A-." Her sister Annie chimed in, 'I can't believe that." Carol asked Kelly, "Did you read why?" and urged her to read the full article. But Annie started telling a story about a classmate who fell through the ice, and Kelly's attention shifted. Still, it interested me that Kelly not only read the chart but responded with her own opinion, even though she did not justify her thinking. She did not take the magazine's authority as a given on this subject that she knew something about.

Kelly also invited me to join the evaluative discussion, critiquing the reviewer's rating of the shows. Kelly and her sisters were comfortable stating their opinions about t.v. They made personal connections with information (as on *Jeopardy*), identified with characters (as they claimed identities on *Full House*), and judged the things they saw (pronouncing scenes "funny" or not, even criticizing the *Jeopardy* contestants). They viewed media through the lens of their own experience, confidently and comfortably tying it to their personal experience. If Kelly could do that with television, why couldn't she do it more easily with books?
As I thought about Kelly's experiences with television and videos, I wondered if her impatience with books came from their slower pace. She wanted to know the plot -- the outcome of the story, which she was used to getting much more quickly from a television show. I realized that, for Kelly, the television held another advantage over books in that it was a shared experience. She cuddled up next to her mother or sisters to watch, and they discussed shows.

One morning Carol laughingly told me how the girls had been watching *Family Matters* the night before in their bedroom, while she watched something else in the main room. "I could hear them laughing, and I'd call in and ask what was happening, and on the commercials they kept running out to tell me what was going on." Television in their household was a social enterprise -- a family matter -- which appeared to provide the comfort and nurturing feelings others associate with reading together.

**Kelly's Crafts**

I had noticed Kelly's artistic sense the day that she helped Laura with her "Ribbons" poem, and I wondered how -- or if -- that side of her had been developed at home. From Joe and Carol, I learned that Kelly liked to make crafts. As Joe put it, "Kelly's kind of craft-oriented. She likes to make things. Whether it's a Valentine's heart or a ghost or something for Halloween, whatever. She definitely ...likes to work with her hands." For her past two birthdays, Joe had taken Kelly to the craft store and allowed her to pick out the supplies she wanted -- beads, stretchy thread, and so on.
One afternoon in the spring, Kelly and I made shrinky-dink bracelets from a craft kit she received for her birthday. She read the directions on the box and helped me figure out what to do. Since she had done it before, she said, "I'll probably finish before you, and I'll help you." She gave me hints on how to cut out the plastic pieces, which would shrink into charms when we heated them. She took the initiative to get the tools we needed -- scissors, baking sheet, even the wastebasket. She reminded me a bit of Eric -- a person of action.

I think Kelly enjoyed the project even more when Maureen came home. Kelly invited her to join us, and said, "Will you cut these? I'll read this and find out what we have to do to bake them." She did, but Maureen looked on, too, and they figured it out together. "I'll just put [the oven] on warm for a second," Kelly said, but Maureen objected, "No, you have to do what it says or it won't work right."

Maureen then took over the reading chores, but Kelly was the one to suggest ways to solve a problem. We had cut some of the plastic too close to the edges, so the holes (by which the decorative pieces were to be strung onto the bracelet) had ripped. I wasn't sure what to do; the plastic was too thick to cut through, but Kelly had an idea. She took plastic scraps and overlaid them with the damaged parts of the decorative pieces. "Maybe the heat will melt them together," she said. It was a good idea, but it didn't work. No problem. Since Kelly couldn't string the damaged pieces, she hooked them on, alternating them with intact pieces.

At school, Kelly's teacher had been concerned that she did not always stick with things or "think deeply," but at home, in a situation and context she understood, Kelly took the initiative and used flexible, critical thinking. Working with a concrete
product, Kelly could consider the problem and propose a solution. I had noted a visual literacy at school -- in her affinity for pictures, as well as in her choice of the ribbon for Laura's poem. I think Kelly's visual literacy had been developed -- and was used more fully -- at home. And that visual literacy was often linked to action -- and to real products. I remembered that Kelly had helped actively during the Native American study when her group made a model corral. She was the one who looked for a nail to poke the holes in the cardboard. She was excited when each child made a weaving as part of that project, too. She liked having a product that lasted.

Kelly's craft-making also appeared to be social. Whereas some people enjoy crafts as a solitary hobby, Kelly did her crafts with a sister, friend, or her mother; I remembered that her mother had said Kelly might be interested in cross-stitch if they sat and sewed together. Kelly's favorite activities -- from television to craft projects -- seemed to involve others.

**Kelly's Consumer Literacy**

The better I knew Kelly, the more clearly I saw her consumer literacy -- her awareness of prices and bargains, her management of money, her quick understanding of math calculations and relationships. One day, as my son and I rushed into the local grocery store for a gallon of milk, we came upon Kelly and Annie on a similar errand. Annie clutched a list of the few items Carol had sent them for, and Kelly carried the money. They knew their way around the store, and as Kelly hurried down one aisle to get the pickles, Annie confidently ordered lunchmeat in the deli department, though I'm sure the worker could hardly see her over the tall counter.
Carol told me the girls had been going around the corner on such errands for her since they were about six years old. When Carol takes the girls grocery shopping with her, they help with the coupons. "I'll give [Kelly] a coupon and say, 'Go get these for me.' And she'll come back. But that means she will have had to read the sign over the aisles to determine which aisle to go into first, then be able to go and find the right size or right brand by having to read all the items." And of course, she would become aware of prices and values.

Math was Kelly's best school subject, and I could understand why. Math (at least in the sense of money management and calculations) was embedded in her daily life. In that sense, it was like her functional reading, but she had a greater appreciation for the utility of money (and consequently a greater love of math) than she did of reading. She performed real work with her money awareness and had something to show for it-- the articles she bought.

At first, I had seen Kelly's consumer literacy as primarily mathematical. But I was beginning to realize that, like Eric's work around the house, Kelly's facility with money was something she could use to create a space for herself in the family and to make a genuine, appreciated contribution. For her, the shopping became an interpersonal literacy -- one way for her to connect with and please others. I remembered that her offers to me of paper and sugar wafers had demonstrated not only her awareness of prices and values, but had shown her generous nature and had helped cement our relationship. Many literacies were interwoven, but the social aspect seemed a central part of all Kelly's literacies.
As I became better acquainted with Kelly outside of school, I continued to work with her and observe her at school, as well. How did she use and display her various literacies there?

**Kelly at School**

**Writing: Reassurance, Comfort, and Voice**

Most of Kelly's first pieces of writing were simple reports of information, and they read almost like lists. For her Best Book, she wrote "About the Author," but she wrote it in pro forma fashion, putting in information the teacher had suggested as options (favorite types of books and writing) even though I would soon learn, those things were not very important to her. It was as if she viewed the writing about herself as an assignment, rather than an invitation.

**About the Author**

My name is Kelly McCormack.
I am ten years old.
I live with my mother and two sisters their names are Maureen and Annie. I like school.
My favorite subjects are math and science. I have red hair and brown eyes. I like to play softball and basketball. I like to read fiction. I like to write about animals. One book I like is the Giving Tree.

In two early pieces, Kelly approached information in a similar way. One, a report about guest speaker Bill Miller, was assigned, and it was one of the few pieces of writing the teacher graded. The other was an "All About" piece -- a genre which children often use to simply get out a variety of ideas. In both pieces, sentences were short, to the point, with ideas arranged almost randomly. Her piece, "All About Deanna," follows.
All About Deanna

Deanna is my best friend in the whole world. I have known her for three and a half years. She is nine years old. She is in Mrs. I's class. I met her when her mother brought her over to the yard I was playing in. I said "Hi my name is Kelly." "Do you want to play me?" and she said "yes". "My name is Deanna". We played all day. She said, "I will play with you tommorrow." When I go over her house we play with flowers making baskets, and watched her baby sister for her mother.

The End

All three pieces (About the Author, Bill Miller, Deanna) were written in early September when Kelly was still finding her place in the class, making friends, and gaining confidence. She wrote the pieces in manuscript rather than cursive, a policy she continued throughout the year. I later learned that cursive writing had been a source of much pressure and unhappiness for her in third grade in her previous school. The other children had learned cursive in second grade, and like them, Kelly was expected to write that way, even when called to write at the chalkboard. She was teased by the other children and received poor handwriting grades from the teacher throughout her two years in third grade. Kelly was relieved to be allowed to use manuscript (most of the time, anyway), and it was just one of the ways the writing workshop provided reassurance and comfort to her and helped her develop confidence. Writing about things she cared about helped, too, as did the ways of working which allowed her to talk to others and turn to them for ongoing help and support.

Those first writings reflected Kelly's lack of confidence in her school performance; they're tentative and safe, but uninteresting. They show little personality or investment. But as Kelly became more comfortable in the class and
began to tell her own stories, her pieces became longer and had more of her own
voice in them -- a pattern that many teachers and researchers have found in writing
workshops (for example, Graves 1983, Hansen 1987, Five 1992). Another of Kelly's
early pieces was a story about her broken tooth. As she wrote, she had conferences
with both Ms. Worth and the student teacher, who asked her questions and urged her
to include details. As she talked about the story, literally using her voice, Kelly
seemed to find her writer's voice. Here is her story.

When I Broke My Tooth

One winter day last year me and my friends were playing on the ice in
the driveway. We were sliding down the driveway on a bed sheet. Then I
went down on my stomach. We were going so fast because the driveway was
slanted.

All of sudden I heard a noise. My friend fell on my head, my tooth
hurt so bad that I could tell it was broken. My nerve was killing me when I
breathed in and out.

I got off the ice and went in my house. My mother looked at it and
called the dentist.

We went and he looked at my aching broken tooth. He said it was so
pointed that he had to fix it right away. He got his tools and used a piece of
plastic to make my tooth the same size as it was before. He used a blue light
to melt the plastic so it would stick to my tooth. Then he put some coloring
on the new part to make it the same color as the rest of my teeth.

I'm glad he was such a good dentist because if he wasn't I wouldn't
have wanted to have my picture taken at school.

In the next three months, Kelly wrote "My Halloween Nightmare," "When I
Went to Maine" (when she saw two bucks with full racks of antlers), acrostic poems
for Thanksgiving and Christmas, a Christmas poem, and two pieces -- a story and a
puppet show -- called "The Whale's Tale." The latter was inspired by some paper
cutouts of sea creatures that Beth Worth had lying around in the room. Ramon had
found them, but when Kelly expressed interest in them, he willingly shared. She told
Once I saw the whale, I decided I wanted to write a story about him. And then I, like, wrote three stories and then I finally figured out what I wanted to write."

Kelly put a lot of thinking and effort into her story, even before writing three drafts. Kelly had planned her story by talking it over with Miss G., the student teacher, who helped her make a story web. As she planned the story, Kelly said to me, "I want to have a whale go from the Pacific to the Atlantic to meet a fish. Would that make sense or would a whale eat a fish?" (She later decided to keep the whale and fish; the imaginative story didn't have to be factual.) She also wondered if a whale could get from the Pacific to the Atlantic, saying, "I don't want it to be bizarre." Soon Kelly and I were poring over a map she found in a textbook so she could decide which ocean route the whale would travel. Later, Kelly considered the best way to make the lobster puppet move and worried that the whale cut-out wasn't big enough compared to the other characters. Beth told me Kelly also spent a long time drawing and coloring the cardboard animals.

As she wrote the final version of the story, Kelly started to plan it as a puppet show. She said, "Miss G is going to laminate them and then I'm going to glue it or somehow get it on the back, and then like move your arm over and move it up and down so it will look like they're swimming, like this...And we'll probably have a whole blue scenery, like Ramon did [his] scenery."

Here is an edited version of her story:

Once there was a whale named Zack who lived in the Atlantic Ocean. He was nice to his friends. One day Zack decided to go on a trip. Zack's third day he met a fish named Vicky. Vicky was beautiful. She was pink and blue. She and Zack traveled together. They were walking along and all of a sudden a lobster jumped out from behind a dock and scared them half to death. He didn't look like the other lobsters. He was red with orange claws. He
introduced himself as Herman. Immediately Zack didn't like Herman because he was always playing jokes on sea creatures -- mean jokes. Herman shook his hand and pinched Zack. Even though Herman liked Vicky, he was mean to her. He pulled her gills, threw seashells at her. Zack got jealous, and Zack and Herman fought over Vicky. Zack won and treated Vicky to a lobster dinner. Zack and Vicky got married and lived happily ever after.

The story followed a standard fairy tale plot line, with a few adaptations, such as the practical joking and the lobster dinner. Its sexual stereotyping was somewhat traditional, too, and I wondered how much the story line had been influenced by soap operas. Beth noted that the story was "almost like a personal narrative...It's a nice little story, imaginative, with a certain amount of character to Zack and Vicky and Herman. [Kelly] developed a little bit in [her] revision..."

Beth thought such development was an important step for Kelly. "Kelly has never experienced serious thinking with details and elaboration. That stands out for me. Many children like her would just slide by if we just did fill-in-the-blanks. I need to keep pushing her, not in a critical way, but it takes a lot to get her to hang in."

The workshop provided that chance for Kelly to go beyond "filling in the blanks." Much of the critical thinking did not even show up in the writing (i.e. the decisions about which ocean and about the puppets), but Kelly had done the thinking, nevertheless. The cardboard props and the assistance with the story web both appeared to have helped Kelly to become deeply interested in the story to develop it and "hang in."

Beth was also aware that "it takes a lot of belonging for [Kelly] to succeed." Writing workshop provided the atmosphere conducive to that belonging.
Kelly continued to request conferences with me, Beth, or the student teacher, to check her spelling, punctuation, and wording, and as I had noticed at the beginning of the year, she usually answered her own questions. But as the year went on, she gained in confidence and came to us less, relying on herself and her peers more. She and her friends helped each other, and their conversations were filled with overlapping talk.

One day, for example, Kelly was writing a rhyme about Christmas, while Laura and Michaela worked nearby. As Kelly called me over to show me her work, Michaela said of it, "I like it. Develop it more, though." Laura added, "Say more about it. Let me help." She took the paper and read, "The star of the tree...is so beautiful...to me?" (suggesting that Kelly add "to me" for the rhyme). Michaela and Laura started to brainstorm about some possibilities, and I overheard, "No, that doesn't make sense," "the glamorous ornaments..." "that are hanging from the tree..." until Kelly interrupted and reclaimed her own work by saying, "This could be about the star. I could do about the tree and different parts of the poem could be about the star, the ornaments..."

Later in the conversation, Kelly offered advice to Michaela. Still later, she told me how she changed her first draft; "I took out, 'It's time to say boohoo. I thought it sounded stupid." The resulting poem was brief, but it was Kelly's first and she was happy with it.

As the year went on, Kelly became more confident making decisions. She would sometimes abandon a piece that wasn't going anywhere (writing VOID in big letters across the paper before filing it). She wrote several more small poems, as well
as stories. Beth told me how pleased she was with Kelly's writing progress. "She's become one of the best at writing personal narrative."

I think the writing workshop worked well for Kelly because it allowed her to seek out others' help and reassurance as she needed it -- part of the belonging that Beth Worth talked about. Kelly did not have to struggle alone, wondering about her spelling or worrying about a word that didn't sound right. She could check it with someone right away. Talk helped her find and expand ideas, but more fundamentally it provided an atmosphere in which she was comfortable -- talking with teachers and friends as she worked helped her find her writer's voice.

**Reading: Pluses and Minuses**

Kelly's confidence in herself as a reader increased, too, though she still did not take readily to books. Carol and Paul said that reading had always been difficult for Kelly, but this year she didn't have as many "anxieties and worries." One big advantage of Beth Worth's class for Kelly was that there were so many varieties of things to read -- posters and charts, reports and publications by previous year's students, current class books, picture books, poetry, novels, and reference materials. Kelly knew her way around books of various kinds, using Tables of Contents, indices, and captions to get information.

Kelly was especially drawn to pictures and was delighted one day when, browsing in a book of aerial photographs of America, she found a lighthouse she'd seen just that weekend in Maine. She got out the book again to show me the photo, pointing out details in it ("See, this little thing is binoculars") and discussing the way the view changed based on where you're situated. "When you go there, it looks like
the lighthouse is on top of the house." She told how her sister Annie had called out
from a distance that it looked that way. Now Kelly pointed to the picture. "See how
they're connected? But from over here (she pointed) you couldn't see that, and it
looked like the lighthouse was on top of the house." She realized that the view
changed according to the viewer's position.

Kelly went on to exclaim over other pictures, particularly one of a Hawaiian
waterfall. She turned that picture around, "I'd think the picture went like this," (so it
looks like a river). "What's good about these [photographs]...they tell you where it is
[in the caption]. At the back of the book, they don't." The availability of a wide
range of materials gave Kelly a chance to experience books in positive and
comfortable ways that related to things in her life and tapped her visual literacy.

But perhaps more importantly for Kelly, her classroom provided many
opportunities for collaborative reading. Sometimes such occasions were a part of the
regular curriculum, as when a group of children read the same book. Kelly usually
took an active role in such groups. For example, when she read *Annie and the Old
One* with Eric and others, she asked and answered questions, and she "read" pictures,
as well as the text. One page features a close-up of a large trash barrel, into which
Annie threw her shoe. Annie is in the background and is very small. Kelly
wondered about this. "How could such a little girl put her shoe in the trash? The
barrel is so big." The student teacher misunderstood Kelly's question and simply
restated what the character had done, but by then Kelly had figured out for herself
that the perspective of the picture caused the disparity of sizes. "Oh, so the trash can
is so big because we're so close to it?"
Kelly interacted with the book like this, especially when she could also interact with peers or adults. I was beginning to think silent reading frustrated her because she didn't have ongoing oral feedback to her questions.

Kelly read not only text and pictures. She also "read" people's intentions and interpretations. In the *Annie* group, Eric once answered the student teacher's question about the character of a hogan by saying, "The grandmother." Kelly immediately explained to the teacher, "You said 'character,' that's why [he misunderstood]."

Spontaneous collaborations sometimes arose on the boundaries of curriculum times (i.e. between writing workshop and thematic studies), and often such interactions occurred informally *during* the work times. One day David had a book which listed addresses of famous people.

Kelly: What's this? (referring to the book. She takes it and opens to a bookmarked page.

(Daryl and Ben come over.)

Daryl: I was looking up...

Ben: I want to write to Magic Johnson. (The day before, Magic Johnson had announced he had the HIV virus.)

Daryl (taking book and browsing): [Here's] Pee Wee Herman.

Kelly: Do they have an index here?

Daryl: Do they have one at the front? I think they do. (He flips back.)

Kelly: It tells you all the people under A. This ain't an index. This is where the book starts.

Daryl: Is it?

Kelly: Then it goes to other names...Know who they have in here?

Daryl: Paula Abdul.
Kelly: Jenny Craig.

Daryl: Paula Abdul.

Kelly (to me): They do this under last names, right?

(I nod.)

(Daryl takes the book and turns pages again.)

Daryl (to Kelly): You went too far. It's A, s, and you need A, d...(He's still interested in Paula Abdul, and he finds it, despite his original misspelling of the name. He reads the address.)

Kelly: It's like Beverly Hills 90210 (the television show). In here it's Beverly Hills 90212. I watched it in my own room. (She explains to Daryl, who used to be her neighbor, and who knows about her house.) Remember the t.v. we used to have to hit? We got it fixed and now we have it in our room with cable...

In this interchange, Kelly and the boys interwove their knowledge of how books work. Kelly started browsing in the book by beginning with the page David had marked, and the others joined in, noting certain recognizable names as they go. But Kelly realized there was a more systematic way to find things and sought an index. Daryl helped, but he turned to the front, rather than the back, and Kelly realized there was no Table of Contents there (or as she said, "index"). She figured out that entries were organized alphabetically by last name. As she went back to browsing, Daryl assumed she was looking for "Abdul", which he wanted to look for, so he took over the operation again. Kelly cooperatively handed over the book so he could do so. Meanwhile, Kelly's interest had been piqued by the Beverly Hills address, which she related to the one she knows from t.v. That led her to boasting
about her new television to Daryl, who could appreciate it because of his familiarity with her old one.

Thus, reading strategies interweave with peer relationships, and the children's world knowledge of the popular culture (Magic Johnson and Beverly Hills) has helped them to connect to one kind of reference book. This kind of reading, like the photography book, held meaning for Kelly because she was able to relate it to her reality.

A similar experience occurred another day when Kelly saw *Free Stuff for Kids* on the table in the meeting area. As she looked through, Kelly told me, "I want to send for something for my birthday..." She pointed to something on a page. "How much is this? Is it a poster?"

"I don't know. Read what it says."

Kelly was already on another page. "Should I get this for my grandmother's birthday? She loves horses." She continued browsing and pronounced, "This is a good book."

She turned back to the front of the book and skimmed the pages which gave directions. "It takes about four to eight weeks? You really have to be patient...I wonder if Ms. Worth would let me take this home and send some postcards." (The directions suggest sending postcards.) She put the book down.

A few minutes later during Independent Reading, Kelly rushed back to the table for the book. "I'm gonna make a list." Ramon sat down with her, and Carlos, sitting nearby, joined in, too. Together they looked at the pages and talked about
what they wanted to send for, collaborating to figure out what things are and how much things cost.

*Free Stuff for Kids* allowed Kelly to use her consumer awareness and her money sense. She was truly interested in it, spent a good bit of time reading it and thinking critically as she did so. Many schools have little or no time for that type of reading; the schedule is tightly packed with basals or limited to fiction. By allowing such reading in the school day, Beth Worth was inviting children to use reading for real purposes. Kelly even took the book home, and with Maureen, made a long list of items that they hoped to send for.

Those were successful occasions for Kelly, as were the small groups. She also benefitted somewhat from the Readers Theater, when the class read *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Trumpet of the Swan*, and *The Pinballs*, easily following along, and occasionally taking a speaking part. She did well on the test Beth gave about *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and she had fun with writing an essay about how she would run the chocolate factory if she were Charlie. Kelly later revised and edited the piece for her Best Book.

When I run the factory I will get some more Ompa-Loompas. I would charge people to visit the factory. I would make walking candy bars. Of all the money I make, I would give half to the factory and the rest to charities.

I would have a skateboard made of lollipops to travel around the factory on. The weather on one half of the factory would be like Hawaii; the other side would be like Alaska. On the Hawaii side there would be a pool and we would always wear shorts, and on the other side we would wear warm jackets.

I would have a room with a rug made of money and the bed would be made of secret recipes. Candy frogs would clean my room and do my homework. Plants would eat chocolate. There would be chocolate books so when you get hungry in school you could eat them. You could have candies that melt into elegant wine.
When Carol McCormack saw the essay at a conference with Kelly and Ms. Worth, she turned to me with a chuckle. "See, Peg, what [Kelly] wants to do with books -- eat them!"

The least successful part of Kelly's in-school reading experience was Independent Reading. She did it, and she even liked some of the books. But she didn't like to sit and read alone. And she didn't think she was very good at it. She consistently picked easy books, often choosing them because they were short. Yet her main criteria for success was number of pages read. My notes record numerous times when Kelly announced to me the number of pages she'd read, as well as times she complimented others on the quantity of their reading or writing. Sometimes she seemed genuinely impressed and at other times, there was a sense that she felt competitive with others, as if she couldn't quite achieve all that others did: "I'm gonna kill you, Michelle. You have so many stories."

Beth expected children to spend their time wisely in both reading and writing, but she did not overemphasize quantity. Like Eric, Kelly nevertheless saw quantity as important, probably because she wished to be more fluent than she was. The one time Beth did assign a certain number of pages was for the class's biography unit. Kelly greeted me one morning, "Guess what, Mrs. Voss, I read two biographies. We have to read one hundred pages, and the teachers have to read two hundred." She was pleased that she had been able to read the one hundred pages.

At the end of the year, I gave the children a questionnaire. One of the questions asked, "What is your favorite kind of reading in class?" To my surprise, Kelly checked not just one category, but four: reading with a partner, reading in a
small group, class books (*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, etc.), and research. She omitted only "independent reading." She liked reading when she could interact with others, but independent reading -- when she was asked to read quietly by herself -- still did not interest her. She needed the talk, the collaboration, the friendly, social interaction that other reading experiences provided. I think of Kelly's ability to learn in these ways as her Interactive Literacy.

**The Hearthkeeper**

Kelly's happiness in Beth Worth's class was due to many things, including interaction with teacher and peers (or Interactive Literacy). But her need for interaction was more than a way of working. She needed to feel accepted by and connected to others, and she was happy in her current class because, as her mother said, "She feels more secure in herself...She feels good about herself; she feels good about her friends. She feels confident in most of the stuff she's doing...The schoolwork is gonna take care of itself now, because she does feel better about herself."

Beth Worth had recognized Kelly's need to belong and to feel good about herself. Early in the year, she invited Kelly to help her after school. Kelly loved it. She stayed often, by choice, to wash the boards, organize the library books, pick up papers. As she did so, she and Beth would usually chat, though occasionally Beth was working with another child while Kelly contentedly puttered on her own. Beth told me she thought of Kelly as "the Hearthkeeper." Beth was using a term from the book, *The Goddess in Every Woman*, and she explained that it meant someone who was a caretaker. Beth believed that Kelly's work after school -- and similar tasks
sometimes taken on during the day -- had helped her gain a sense of belonging to the class. "Kelly is the primary hearthkeeper in the room, and she knows it. It's her part in the culture of the classroom. Her caretaking has made her involved." One day, I overheard Kelly tell a friend, "I like working as long as it's not cleaning my room." She had other ways to contribute at home -- her errands to the store, for example.

I occasionally wondered if this kind of work reinforced Kelly's eagerness to please rather than giving her an opportunity to exhibit a strength. But, watching Kelly and seeing her pleasure in activity, I concluded that Beth was right. The work allowed Kelly to be the one-caring, not only the cared-for, in the caring relationship as Nel Noddings (1984) has written about it. Kelly often chose to be the receiver of care and attention, particularly in areas which called for reading or academic performance -- when she relied on her sister, when she questioned adults in order to be reassured that she was on the right track with her schoolwork. In such situations she strayed dangerously close to helplessness rather than merely wishing for care. But she could be the care-giver -- more responsible and assertive -- by helping in the class. Like Eric, Kelly liked to contribute real work.

Kelly took on the care-giver role in other ways. She often assisted others during the course of the day, showing Nina how to tell time, making sure I knew which page the group was on, handing out the folders. On the surface, this side of Kelly may appear to have little to do with her literacies -- print or otherwise. But I believe one of her strengths is what Gardner calls "interpersonal intelligence," which "turns outward, to other individuals. The core capacity...is the ability to notice and make distinctions among other individuals and, in particular, in their moods,
temperaments, motivations, and intentions." (Gardner 1983, 239, emphasis in original). In young children, this intelligence is shown when young children recognize people's various moods or when adults "read" others (as Elizabeth did in Neilsen's study). Beth's recognition of Kelly through encouraging her "hearthkeeper" role had honored interests which Kelly already had and encouraged her to take an active role in the class from the beginning -- not only in caring for the room, but in caring for other children.

While these caring activities helped Kelly find a comfortable and appreciated place in the class, at the same time, Beth was aware of a need to help such children be "more empowered as thinkers." Kelly, and other children like her, "are not confident thinking or putting things out there, at least not in a [large] group." One of Beth's goals for Kelly had been to develop that confidence, and in small groups and informal interactions, Kelly did demonstrate critical thinking. Her "hearthkeeper" or "caregiver" role gave evidence of pragmatic critical thinking. When Ryan angrily kicked someone's chair because it was in the way, Kelly was the one who noted an easy solution and organized the children to simply move the chairs. But more than that, Kelly often knew how much to nudge others and when to back off.

One day she had the following interchange with Paul, who was in a belligerent mood due to his frustration with the work. The children were supposed to read large numbers (which were written in words) and translate them into numerals. Paul was trying to translate "two hundred forty-five thousand" into numerals. He had written, "200,450." He muttered something, and Kelly, sitting at the next desk, turned to help him.
Kelly: When you write two hundred forty-five thousand...you know how to write two hundred forty-five, right? You write that. Then you put three zeros. That makes thousand.

Paul: Shut up. I'm trying to understand this and my pencil's gone. (He pushes his chair sharply, frustrated.)

Kelly: So do you get what I mean?

Paul: Okay, I get it. You can shut up now.

Kelly: When you get down here (pointing down the page), you can't just add zeros. It changes a little.

(She looks at his paper.) Can I just tell you one thing? You should cross out the numbers [of the problems as you do them] 'cause sometimes you read the same number again. (She demonstrates by putting a line through the number in front of the problem.)

Instead of writing thousands, ignore the thousands. Forget the thousand is there.

Paul: You can't forget the thousands. (He reads aloud the next problem): "Two hundred fifty-four thousand, one hundred twenty-two." (He figures it out with my help, as Kelly works on her own paper.) She doesn't give us enough time for this crap.

Kelly: She does, but you came in a lot late.

Kelly, unoffended by Paul's harsh directive to "shut up" saw that he really needed assistance, and she continued offering her suggestions. Some of the children would have gone running to Ms. Worth to report Paul's rudeness, but Kelly dealt with it in her own productive way. She knows Paul, recognizing that he often gets frustrated and speaks sharply. She realizes his anger is directed against the situation, not her, and she persists in her explanation. Her instructions to Paul, while not teaching the concept behind the numbers, proposed effective strategies, both for translating the numbers into numerals and for keeping track of the work completed so far. At one point, when she asks, "Can I tell you just one thing?" she is, on the one
hand, subtly inviting him closer (through the use of a question, though she doesn't wait for an answer), and at the same time signalling that she has received his message and is about to back off. She recognizes that she has gone as far as he will accept and that her message of withdrawal will be reassuring to him.

In this situation, Kelly was showing her care or regard for Paul, despite his lack of gratitude. She backed off and allowed me to help him, but quietly challenged his assertion that the teacher had not provided enough time, reminding Paul that he had been late. Kelly acted with confidence in this event, confident that Paul would listen to her despite his angry words, and confident that she knew what she was doing -- both in the math and in her relationship with Paul.

According to Vygotsky, children learn who they are through their interactions with other people. In those interactions, children not only get to know others, but they learn about themselves by noticing how they are perceived by others. (Vygotsky 1978) Gardner, too, asserts that intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences are closely entwined and largely influenced by culture. He defines "sense of self" as "the balance struck by every individual -- and every culture -- between the promptings of "inner feelings" and the pressures of "other persons." Sense of self is linked to the ways others in the culture perceive you. While Gardner is referring to culture in its larger context, if we think of home cultures as distinct from school cultures, we can see that children must adjust their self-concepts as they adjust their behavior to the new culture of school, in general, and a new classroom culture each year. In Kelly's case, the culture of her previous school affected her sense of self because she was seen as deficient -- in her handwriting and other academic areas, and
she came to feel inadequate. Further, she was unable to demonstrate many of her interpersonal skills in that particular classroom. The current situation was more successful for her because of the ways she could practice her interactive literacies. It was more supportive of her sense of self.

In semiotic terms, Kelly knows how to read the signs of Paul's behavior. She hears not only the literal meaning of his words, but she interprets his tone, his gestures, what she knows of his past behaviors, and what she see in the current situation. In other words, she considers the entire context and comes to her personal understanding of what Paul means (and what would be appropriate reponse from her).

Kelly's ability to tune in to others resembles what Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule call "connected knowing." "Connected knowers develop procedures for gaining access to other people's knowledge. At the heart of these procedures is the capacity for empathy." (Belenky et. al, 113) At age ten, Kelly has not fully developed her connected knowing. When Kelly reads or even when she watches television, she does not yet enter into the author's or the characters' mind, for example. (Many of the young adults interviewed by Belenky and her colleagues indicate that is how they read.) But Kelly has developed some capacity already for "knowing" others. She knows how to appeal to her father; she (and her sisters) have empathy for their younger cousins and for a mentally handicapped neighbor (they sometimes babysit together for short times and thoroughly enjoy caring for the others). Kelly's literacies involve this ability to interpret and respond to people.
I saw many of the same interactive strengths in Carol McCormack that I saw in Kelly. She was keenly aware of her daughters' similarities and differences, and she tried to be tuned in to their feelings. She knew her neighbors well and traded favors with them. Every morning she made an extra cup of coffee for Mrs. Carter next door; Maureen delivered it when she went there to fold newspapers with Mrs. Carter's daughter, who also had a route. Carol, like Kelly, liked interaction in learning situations. Once when we talked about her college work, she told me a conversation she had with a woman in her class.

"We both felt that we were the type of people that would get ten times more from a discussion class. That neither one of us really retained much, that we could read information, but as far as - like Anne Frank (assigned in her history class) -- I will pick up more on that because I know more about it, I've seen the movie, I've read the book before, but as far as the French Revolution and other things...I'll read it, I don't know if I would remember it to go and sit and take the test."

Kelly's confidence in informal and small-group academic situations improved throughout the fall and into the winter and spring. She still did not contribute much in the large group, but projects and presentations gave her some of her greatest success. Beth was convinced that much of Kelly's progress resulted from her strengthened sense of self as practiced in her "hearthkeeper" or caregiver role. I agreed, but it was more than helping after school that had allowed Kelly to feel connected. The culture of her class was such that she was not isolated into silence. She had opportunities to help others -- and to call on them for help. She was able to call on her home literacies. That had made her feel more at home -- and more confident.
Home, School, and Interactive Literacies

I have described and discussed Kelly's interactions with others many times. I think interactions with others are clearly important to her, not only because they help her become part of the group, but also because they help her learn. I think of her Interactive Literacy as similar to Howard Gardner's interpersonal intelligence.

But there is another kind of interactive literacy which Kelly exhibits, and that is when she finds ways for her various literacies -- visual, media, consumer, oral -- to come together and overlap each other. At home, craft projects might tap various literacies -- from purchasing the craft kit (consumer literacy), to designing and making a product that mattered to her (visual literacy), to cooperatively working with one of her sisters or her mother (interactive literacy).

At school, projects which helped her -- or allowed her -- to bring her literacies together were her most successful undertakings. Print alone (work written or read) did not allow Kelly to demonstrate all that she knew or could do. Carol McCormack put it this way as she talked about the Native American project the class did at the beginning of the year:

[I] wasn't just a question of doing the story and learning those words; they did the story, concentrated on the spelling words, but they also did the project in class where they made the dream catcher, the tipis, and they had the whole set-up in the classroom on display about everything in the Indian's world, as far as how they lived and how they ate or what they ate. I remember [Kelly] talking about how they dried the hides and treated the hides of the animals for clothing and the tipis and different things. So it was a whole collaborated effort. As opposed to just reading a story and getting that small basis of information out of it, because it all coincided together. And it's been the same with other projects that they've done in class.
The story, "A Whale's Tale," was successful largely because of the cardboard figures which Kelly traced and colored to accompany the story (and which she made into puppets). Beth told me Kelly spent days drawing and redrawing fish until Beth was about to intervene and nudge her on. But she waited, and Kelly soon finalized her story. I remembered Judy Fueyo's article in which she and teacher Chris Gaudet agonized over whether to allow a first-grader to design paper airplanes during writing time, if they insisted he write. They did allow it and it did lead him into writing.
(Fueyo 1990)

As Fueyo shows so well, children sometimes need to "transmediate" or work across several media. Like the first-grader, Kelly used an art form to lead her into the writing of her tale. Schools encourage multi-media expressions when children are in kindergarten and first grade, but by the intermediate grades they are expected to respond almost totally in print. Researcher Colette Daiute (1992) speaks of "multi-media composing" as a way for children, especially those with difficulties in reading or writing, to develop written language. She particularly encourages computer use, but also says that, even without computers, teachers can use "visual and aural media as sources for text." (259) Beth Worth encouraged children to use varied media for inspiration. Ramon (with his paper constructions) most obviously benefitted from this approach, but Kelly and others did, too, in the thematic projects.

Projects usually culminated in presentations. When the children read biographies, they dressed up as the famous people and presented speeches, which Beth videotaped. Kelly, in a black dress and high heels, was Barbara Bush. Carol McCormack confided to me later, "She just had to have pearls," and though Kelly
was nervous (she told me she hates to give oral presentations), she did well and seemed to enjoy herself.

The most successful project of the year, however, was Kelly's Heritage project. For the Heritage project, each child chose a country of her/his own heritage to research. I discovered that Kelly's background was not totally Irish, for she chose Portugal, the heritage of her mother's father. A class of students from the college served as mentors for the students, coming once a week for six weeks to help the children do research. Beth had prepared a packet which suggested some of the information to find. She felt it helped children explore and develop their topics more fully; she said the packet "gave [Kelly] depth and something to think about. The format gave her something to work with." With her college mentor, Kelly found out about the geography, climate, and customs of Portugal, filling out sheets of information and writing a report, shown in figure 6-2 (on the next page).

The children also painted large flags, which Beth hung from the ceiling. Each child or group of children prepared some kind of visual. Kelly decided on a poster which showed various facts about Portugal -- holidays, famous sites, customs; she drew pictures or cut them from magazines to illustrate. She shared the poster for her presentation to the class.
Portugal

Portugal is on the continent of Europe. The capital of Portugal is Lisbon. The flag colors are green, red, yellow, and blue. The language is called Portuguese. Most Portuguese converse in English. The leader of the government is a president. The president of Portugal serves a term of five years. Portuguese government is a republic. Portugal's area in square miles is 35,553. The number of people in square miles is 250. The latitude of Portugal is 40 degrees, and the longitude of Portugal is 80 degrees. 50 percent of Portugal's land is used for farming. 31 percent is covered with forests. Some of Portugal's natural resources are trees, fishing, industry, oil, grapes, and copper. Manufactured resources cork, wine, cotton, textiles, footwear, paper, metal working, and oil refining. Some traditional foods are dried 'cod fish,' snail vegetables, pork chops, and wine. Some sports and games are soccer, roller-skating, hockey, sailing, and the most popular sport is bullfighting. Two of Portugal's holidays are Portugal Day, on June 10, and Liberty Day, on April 25. Last names of people in my background are Silver, Marshall, Bettencourt, Machado, and Mello. Some restaurants owned by people in my background are O'fados, Portugale, and CasaPortul.

Tips

1. A warm, firm handshake.
2. You should call your friends, youth, and children by their first name. Otherwise, a title is used.
3. Guests should be invited inside the house.
4. It is not polite to ask a lot of questions.
5. Sincere compliments are polite.
6. You should avoid eating food on the street with the exception of ice cream.
7. A sincere smile is always welcome.
8. It is polite to keep your hands to yourself.

Here are some maps if you ever go to Portugal!

Figure 6-2 Kelly's Portugal Report

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However, the center of Kelly's project was a personal experience story. Kelly worked very hard on the story. Beth said, "I kept asking her more questions, personal questions. She worked with that piece the same way David (known as a strong student and a good researcher) worked with his piece -- for a long time. That was developed. When she first came in [to the class], she never thought she had power to develop." Kelly's investment in the story was clear. See Figure 6-3 on page 294.

Kelly read the story to the class at Beth's request, and reprinted it in the class literary anthology. Kelly was very proud of it.

I think that the story of the parade may have been particularly significant to Kelly because it was a time when she was "in the middle" in a most positive way. She was a central figure in the parade, with one of the most important parts. Not overshadowed by her sisters, who were also in the parade, Kelly was a central figure, literally encircled by others.

Beth pointed out to me another key thing about Kelly's project: "She had all those wonderful pictures that honored her. They gave honor to who she is." Beth was right. Kelly had included snapshots of the parade, some of which featured her in her costume, surrounded by other marchers, smiling straight into the camera. As wonderful as Kelly's experience in the parade had been, I wondered if she would have presented it as happily if she had not had the pictures. The visual aspect of the presentation helped showcase her written words. Kelly even asked her mother for a portrait of her and her sisters to put on the cover of her written report. Beth took it to a local copy center and made a colored copy so she could return the original to her home.
One Portuguese tradition is the Holy Ghost Parade in Peabody, Mass. For a week before the parade the couple was picked to be the king and queen of the parade. They get gold crowns and a big white stand with a gold dove and gold flowers to sit upon. The king and queen and all the Portuguese people who want to join them say the rosary together for a week. Since I didn’t know the language it seemed very strange. I only went one night and my mother went for the week.

The week before the big parade the king and queen decide who gets a part to play in the parade. I was Mary and another kid was Joseph and four kids held a ribbon around us. I wore a shawl and held a doll for the baby Jesus. My sister, Kate, was Saint Teresa. My two cousins held her ribbon and she held a big rose. My sister, Stephanie, held a big stuffed dove with ribbons hanging from it. Little kids held the ribbons but the parade had to stop about ten times because the little kids couldn’t keep up. My mom’s aunt and uncle were the king and queen. Their kids and grandkids got to carry a big banner. Halfway through the parade there is a Portuguese Mass. A Portuguese priest says the mass. Right before the mass is over the priest blesses the people. When you get blessed the priest puts a gold crown on your head, shakes incense over your head and says a prayer for you. My cousin, who is handicapped, went up for a blessing.

While the mass was going on, the kids go back to my aunt’s house and have lunch. When the mass is over the kids meet the grown-ups at the church and the parade continues down the street for about a mile. We wind our way back to the church where we started, and we have a big roast Beef dinner with ice cream. When the kids are done, they go out of the church and dance to the music of the band.

And THAT is a Portuguese tradition!

Figure 6-3 Kelly’s Portugal Story
Reading and writing were not particularly meaningful to Kelly on their own, but when they connected with other literacies, she could use them well, and her literacy experience became richer. The Portugal report included many of Kelly's literacies. The pictures, the cover, and the poster tapped her visual literacy. The story was a report of her interactional literacy, her involvement with others, this time in a presentation, the parade. To prepare the story, she did not work alone, but consulted her mother, peers, mentor, and teacher for help with various parts. The school project not only brought together many of her literacies, but it was a way for her to bring some of the most positive elements of her home life into her school experience. As Alma Flor Ada has said (Palladino, 1992), "A child lives in two worlds: home and school. Unless those worlds come together, validate each other, a child cannot be whole." The Portugal project helped Kelly bring those two worlds together, both in the preparation of the project and in the topic itself.

**Connections Made: Connections Missed**

Kelly had a good year. She was an accepted member of the classroom community, and, in her classroom, she could use many of the literacies she had developed at home. She was able to make many of the connections she sought -- with people (friends and teacher) and with products (projects and successful academic work). She was able to connect home and school in a number of ways. Even the spelling assignments helped her link home and school. Joe said, "I think when she brings her reading home, and she has to read like a [spelling] story every other day or something like that...she really looks forward to that." Carol's response was, "I don't think she looks forward to reading it. I think she looks forward to
having to read it to me." Parental involvement of this sort supported Kelly's eagerness for interaction and approval.

But Kelly's good year was not perfect. Though the classroom allowed her to take advantage of her interactive literacies, some interactions with others were problematic.

For the major spring project, students worked in pairs to research, write, and illustrate books about animals of their choice. Kelly worked with her neighborhood friend, Jody, researching dolphins. Despite their friendship outside of school -- or maybe because of it -- Kelly and Jody had a hard time working together. One day I witnessed an angry confrontation, in which Jody accused Kelly of letting her do all the work. As Jody raised her voice, Kelly lowered hers and tried to placate Jody. She admitted that Jody had done more of the work so far, apologized, and offered to do more. But Jody stayed on the attack and refused to compromise. Jody felt Kelly had been unfair, so she retaliated by being unreasonable. Finally, I intervened and later Beth did, helping the girls to identify what they still needed to do and how to do it.

The report turned out fine, but the rocky process indicated that collaborative work does not always proceed smoothly. In this case, Kelly had slipped into letting someone else do the work, and even her powers of negotiation were not enough to assuage her friend's anger. Even here, however, Kelly showed evidence of "connected knowing." She understood her friend's angry feelings and admitted she had been wrong. It was Jody who would not budge. She did not acknowledge or understand Kelly's appeal for forgiveness, opting instead to continue the fight. It
took extensive help from Beth Worth (along with continued contrition from Kelly) to get the project on track again.

In academics, Kelly had regained her confidence. She had a positive attitude toward school again. The one remaining missed connection was that she still did not willingly read books on her own. She had read several books with a partner or small group, three books with the class in Readers' Theater, and only a handful of books on her own. At home, the only book she had read all the way through was an *Amelia Bedelia* book I gave her; she'd read it in an earlier grade, and reread it easily.

In the summer, Kelly and I went to the library together. I tried to help her find a book she'd like. We browsed through books by Joanna Hurwitz, since Kelly had liked *Class Clown* when she read it with Jemma, but Kelly turned away. We read together several pages of *Anastasia* before Kelly shook her head, no. I showed her *Are You There God, It's Me, Margaret*, which I thought would be a surefire hit. But Kelly was not interested. She chose two very thin Dell Yearling mysteries. We agreed that I would read some other mysteries and we'd talk about them in a few weeks. But when I called back, Kelly said sheepishly, "Mrs. Voss, I have something to tell you. I didn't read any of those books." She said she'd been having a wonderful summer and was too busy to read.

I know that Kelly can read, and because of her experience with a wide range of videos and movies, I think she understands something of plot, character, and other story elements. But if she is to continue on to college, she'd do well to become more of a reader. And I'd like to see her lose herself in a book, not just for the goal of college, but for the sheer pleasure of it.
How can that happen? For Kelly, who so longs to be connected to others, reading seems too solitary an enterprise. Perhaps she'd respond to more opportunities for partnered reading. Perhaps her interest in media could be used to hook her into books -- comparing movie and book versions of a story, making videotapes or other presentations about books. Simply talking and sharing books more might help Kelly to connect.

Beth Worth told me she wanted to improve her reading program, and we talked about having more times for children to share the books they read -- not only in small groups when they read the same title and not just in the spontaneous ways that they already did so often (as the children did with *Free Stuff for Kids* and the book of addresses). Regular, planned opportunities for them to talk about books might have helped Kelly. Beth planned to do more of that next year, and she told me she wished she had understood sooner how much Kelly needed interaction. Beth said she would have "hooked her up" with someone else to read together more. We hoped that Kelly's fifth grade teacher would offer her those opportunities.

It would be wonderful if Kelly could be inspired to read more at home, perhaps reading with her sisters and mother. I suggested some titles that Kelly and her sisters and mother might enjoy reading together.

But in the meantime, it's important to acknowledge and celebrate the other literacies which Kelly does have. They are worthwhile, too, and over time, if Kelly's strengths continue to be valued in school, she may find ways to connect them to reading, in the way that she connected them to writing and projects in her fourth grade class.
CHAPTER SEVEN

MERGING HOME AND SCHOOL LITERACIES

Literacies Prints

Denny Taylor (1991) has said that every individual has his/her own "literacy print," a configuration as unique as a fingerprint. The ways we interact with print -- our purposes and preferences, our strategies and approaches -- along with our individual literacy histories, combine to create a distinctive print or portrait of each person's literacy. I would suggest that when we consider our non-print literacies -- our other meaning-making systems and expressions -- each of us has a multidimensional, individual literacies print.

Janette, Eric, and Kelly show distinctive patterns in their uses of print, their interactions with others, their ways of making meaning, and their methods of demonstrating what they know. Their families, their interests, and their experiences have combined to create individual prints -- or portraits -- which differ from each other and from those of Paul, Michaela, Ramon, and the other fourth-graders in their classroom community.

In school, some of their distinctions are easy to see. While Janette reads fluently and confidently, Kelly resists reading books and Eric has even greater
difficulty reading; he prefers hands-on projects. Janette sees herself as a writer and writes a variety of genre, while Kelly has little confidence in herself as a writer; she grows more interested as she invests herself in personal narrative stories and in reports which tap her own experience. Eric, too, finds writing workshop offers a window to his interests, writing mainly about the outdoor experiences he enjoys so much. All three children are more comfortable working in small groups than in the large class, but they respond in different ways. Kelly and Janette negotiate within the groups, while Eric tends to stay on the sidelines. Janette sometimes takes a leadership role, albeit quietly.

A sensitive teacher can quickly discover the differences among the children as readers, writers, and members of the classroom community, as Beth Worth did, and can try to support their varied strengths. But such observations of the children's individual profiles only scratch the surface of the children's strengths, interests, and literacies. Even in a highly literate classroom with a talented, reflective teacher, it is difficult to see the fine lines in the literacies prints which children bring with them from home to school. It is harder still to tap and to celebrate those multiple literacies.

**What are Multiple Literacies?**

The children's varied literacies -- talk, creating and building with tools (mechanical literacies), consumer awareness, "reading" people (interactive literacy) --- can be seen as literacies because they are ways of making meaning by reading signs in the surrounding environment. They suggest fundamental ways each learner observes situations, interprets or "reads" those situations, and finds significance. I suggest that true literacy in any particular domain represents more than a style of
working. Rather, it represents a way of seeing, understanding, and responding to
problems and circumstances. Not all learning represents a literacy, for a literacy is a
developed system of meaning-making which can be used in a number of ways.

On one level, learners use a literacy functionally, to get things done.
Alternately, they use a literacy to relate or communicate with others. Sometimes,
they use a literacy reflectively, to think critically or to figure things out. And finally,
they may use a literacy for enjoyment, for personal pleasure in the practice of it.
People who are learning a literacy but are not yet "fluent" in it (or not yet fully
"literate") use the literacy in some, but not all, the ways. A person who is truly
literate in a domain uses his or her literacy in all those ways, depending on the
particular situation. Thus, a person who is truly print literate not only reads and
writes in order to get through life's chores and encounters, but also uses print to relate
to others, to reflect on meanings (to think critically about what he or she reads and
writes), and, sometimes, simply for personal enjoyment. Furthermore, a truly literate
person uses his/her literacy flexibly, applying it as needed in new situations.

I'd like to explore again the home literacies of the case study children. How
do the children use those literacies functionally, communicatively, reflectively,
pleasurably, and flexibly? What is the nature of those home literacies? Further, what
does our knowledge of children's home literacies suggest for school practice in
general and for the teaching of print literacy, in particular?
The Home Literacies of Eric, Kelly, and Janette

Children and Print

A look at the home literacies of Janette, Eric, and Kelly shows some of the variety each child brings with him or her to school. First, consider print literacy. All three children use print in functional ways -- writing notes and lists, reading signs, directions, and labels. Eric does such tasks more infrequently than the others, and Kelly sometimes relies on her older sister or adults to help her, but all are able to navigate through the sea of print that surrounds them in their daily lives. All three use print to make or sustain relationships with others, though the girls do this more than Eric, and Janette more than Kelly. They make cards, write notes and letters, and use writing in their play.

Only Janette, however, routinely uses print literacy for reflection and personal expression (her diary) or to help her work through problems (such as her grandmother's illness and death). And only Janette reads and writes just for the pleasure of it. She is flexible in her uses of print literacy. She reads unfamiliar technical print at the science museum; she creates a new chart to help her family get organized in the morning; she is comfortable with print in many varied and unfamiliar situations.

Kelly, on the other hand, turns to others to help her interpret new forms of print. Though she might, in fact, be able to figure out for herself directions to a new toy or a news article, she does not always believe she can and relies on her sister or adults to mediate for her. Only with environmental print, such as packages, advertisements, and the captions under pictures, does Kelly comfortably rely on
herself. Eric, too, is uncertain in new situations which involve print -- even in
contexts which he enjoys, such as video games. Rather than reading words on the
video screen, he avoids them, figuring out meanings from the action rather than the
printed information. Since Eric and Kelly do not use print literacy in a full range of
ways, they are not yet fully print literate. However, I see them as literate in other
ways. The children's knowledge in certain non-print literacies can be documented by
the multiple ways they make meaning: functionally, communicatively, reflectively,
and enjoyably. Also, they are able to use their knowledge in these literacies in
flexible ways.

Eric: A Different Kind of Knowing

Eric, not particularly comfortable with print or with talk, knows a great deal
about woodworking, tools, and vehicles (what I call his mechanical literacies). He
learns by watching and then trying things on his own. He finds meaning in work, in
showing what he knows, rather than talking about it. His close relationships with his
father and his uncles provide him with models -- of things he can do and of roles he
can assume or aspire to. More important, those relationships contribute to his
self-esteem by giving him a sense of belonging.

How do Eric's mechanical literacies exhibit the criteria of functionality,
communication, reflectiveness, enjoyment, and flexibility?

**Functionality.** Clearly, Eric's knowledge of tools and vehicles holds great
functional value for him. He can use the tools to make real objects for himself or
others. He can actually drive snowmobiles and four-wheelers. He can repair his
bike. In Eric's family and extended family, work is highly valued, and his ability to
work with tools and vehicles gives him status, connecting him to people he admires, just as it connects him to objects he can control. The functional nature of Eric's tool and vehicle literacies are therefore closely connected to their communicative nature. Not only do such literacies allow Eric to get things done, they allow him (sometimes, at least) to get things done for and with others.

**Communication.** The social nature of Eric's literacies resembles what we know of young children's language learning. Infants' impulses to learn language stem not only from their physical needs, but also from the reinforcements of social interactions and responses. Language learning is a process of meaning-making, both linguistically and culturally. As Halliday has said, "A child's construction of a semantic system and his construction of a social system take place side by side, as two aspects of a single unitary process." (Halliday, 1978, 121) So it is for Eric and his mechanical literacies. They help him make both personal and social meaning. Eric's literacies help him to be a part of his family culture, particularly the male culture of his father and uncles.

**Reflection.** In what ways does Eric reflect as he practices his literacies? Because he is so taciturn, it was hard for me to see his reflection at all. Only after extensive analysis of my observations did I come to understand that Eric's supposed lack of metacognition was my blindness rather than his deficit. Eric's reflections were body intuitions rather than verbal ones. As he demonstrated his sled to me, he moved to it, he touched it, he motioned to show how he knew what to do. Then he sat on the sled, swaying with its supposed motion. My persistent nudging pushed Eric to explain in words that process which he had already reflected on in his
intuitive motions, in the decisions he made as he chose materials and adjusted them until they made physical sense. In short, Eric's reflection is that of the reflective practitioner described by Donald Schon (Schon, 1983): reflection in practice, which may not always mean reflection in words.

I suggest that Eric's connection with the tools and objects themselves illustrate his reflectiveness and insight. He likes to work with concrete objects, to manipulate them, to use touch and motion as ways of understanding them. Piaget theorized that children could not reach the stage of formal operations until they had passed through a stage he called concrete operations. But rather than a developmental level tied to mental growth and maturation, facility with actual objects and concrete understandings may be a necessary prelude to abstraction simply because it provides essential background knowledge about a field or domain. Eric's connectedness to objects, his kinesthetic abilities, increase his understandings of how things are put together. As he fiddles and plays and experiments with objects, he thinks critically about them, even though he may be unable to verbalize his reflections and analysis. This may lead him to think abstractly about possibilities for designs and adaptations. We need to know more about how such thinking works.

**Enjoyment.** There can be little doubt that Eric's literacies hold enjoyment for him. He hums unconsciously as he plays with the sled on the kitchen floor; he talks proudly of his vehicles and writes willingly of his activities in New Hampshire. He chooses to use his tools or to ride his vehicles whenever he can, much as Janette chooses to read.
**Flexibility.** Furthermore, Eric's knowledge of tools and of vehicles is flexible. Though his knowledge is incomplete (he can take the bike apart but cannot put it back together correctly), he knows enough to apply his knowledge in different ways. Once familiar with tools, he can use them to fix his train set as well as his bike. He can even create something new, like the sled.

**Kelly: Interactive and Loving It**

In contrast to Eric, Kelly depends on talk to learn. Talk is important because it links her to others. As a middle child, she has built-in playmates at home, and she is used to negotiating with them to play games and make decisions. Her consumer literacy, her interest in crafts, and her media literacy have grown out of interactions within her family. She is good at reading people and spends most of her time with others. Like Eric, she likes to contribute real work that is appreciated by others. It's one more way she connects to people.

Kelly's interactive literacy (which incorporates her reading of people, some aspects of her consumer literacy, and even her media awareness) is functional, communicative, reflective, and pleasurable for her. It is also flexible.

**Functionality.** Kelly uses her interactive literacy in functional ways whenever she solicits help. By inviting others to assist her, she gets things done -- sometimes, ironically enough, by answering her own questions. I found that I spent more time with Kelly than with the other case study children simply because of her appeal -- in both senses of the word. She was appealing in her friendliness and accessibility, and she made direct appeals for attention and assistance.
Kelly also uses her interactive ability to get things done for the benefit of the group. Recall the way she insisted on the proper ribbon to complement the "sparkely, darkely" poem; she knew how to be assertive without offending, and she was not shy about speaking her mind. Kelly's consumer awareness, her media literacy, and her facility with crafts have all grown out of her interactive literacy, for all are activities that are done in a group or for the benefit of the group (with the group most frequently defined as her family).

**Communication.** The nature of Kelly's interactive literacy is that she relates to others. Its communicative nature is part of its function, its reason for being. In fact, relationships are so essential to Kelly that she has little interest in solitary activities, such as silent reading. Beth Worth calls Kelly "the hearthkeeper" for her interest in caring for the classroom. Kelly is comfortable in either role described by Noddings in the caring relation (1984): either the one-caring or the one-cared for.

**Reflection.** Kelly uses her interactive literacy reflectively as she considers how to interact with others, when to press them, and when to retreat. This is evident in her relationships with family members and friends. Kelly, more than her sisters, solicits her father's visits. She knows how to read others' moods. But Kelly can not always verbalize these awarenesses, these subtle character judgements, just as she seldom analyzes television characters in depth. Like Eric, she can act on her reflections, better than she can explain them. She can read subtle signs of others' behavior and know their meaning. Talk does help her to reflect. Often, by talking, Kelly finds herself explaining things to herself -- thinking out loud. But she finds it
hard to reflect all alone; another's response -- or at least the potential of it -- creates the situation in which she can consider her own ideas.

**Enjoyment.** Kelly uses her interactive literacy because it brings her enjoyment. As Gilligan (1982), Belenky et al. (1986), and others have shown, girls frequently specialize in relationships and relational thinking. Kelly likes people, and she seeks out people and interactions. She made friends quickly in her new classroom, she loves to care for younger children in the neighborhood. Whenever she can, she chooses to be with others, building relationships.

**Flexibility.** Kelly's interactive literacies are flexible and transferable across situations. She can read her classmate, Paul, just as she can read her mother. She is unhappy only when she cannot connect -- as she could not in her previous school, due to a conflict with her teacher and an imposed silence, which limited her interactions and consequently some of her learning strengths.

**Janette: Mainstream Literacy as Advantage and Disadvantage**

Janette is a strong student because her home and school literacies dove-tail so nicely. She has been read to since babyhood, she participates in a wide range of print-related activities in her household, and she has been exposed to a variety of cultural and community experiences, such as frequent trips to museums and woods. She takes part in organized activities, too, ranging from sports to Campfire Girls. As a result, she's highly literate at home, not only in print activities, but in world awareness. She is encouraged to express her opinions, her feelings, and her questions, and she actively takes part in family discussions. Also, like Kelly, Janette shows great sensitivity toward others.
Uses of print. I have stated earlier that Janette is print literate in ways that
the other two case study children are not. She uses print not only to get things done
(literally reading signs in her environment, for example), and not only to
communicate and reach out to others. But she uses writing and reading as vehicles
for personal expression and reflection, and she enjoys them. She critiques books and
ideas more readily than many of the children in her class. Thus she knew she did not
want to change the ending to her dolphin poem even when the teacher suggested it;
she knew she had said what she wanted to say. She knows her mind. Speaking up
for her opinion is another story, however, especially when she is away from the
safety of her family unit. Sometimes she expresses her judgements (especially in
small group situations, when she often directs the other children according to what
she judges the best way to do things). In the large classroom group, however, she
tends to defer to others. Subtle societal messages about girls' expected behavior
apparently squelch expression of reflections and opinions in such groups. Still,
Janette can and does think critically about her reading and writing. In addition, she
uses her print literacy flexibly, easily applying it to new situations, whether it be
writing to a new pen pal or reading a reference book.

Advantages and disadvantages. Janette's mainstream print literacy is a
major advantage for her in school, for the literacy she has brought from home fits
well with expectations for school performance. But in one way, Janette's print
literacy may be a disadvantage, as well. Because her print literacy is so strong,
Janette's other literacies remained less visible to me. I was so fascinated by her
abilities with print that I never seriously investigated her artistic or athletic strengths,
and I also gave less attention to her interactive skills than they deserved. I think this is an easy mistake for educators to make, particularly for girls like Janette who get society's message to participate quietly. Talented and unobtrusive, Janette and others like her are favored by teachers for their performance and cooperation, but other talents may remain undeveloped. As in so many areas, the family, its culture, and its expectations make the difference for a child like Janette. Because the Dumonts recognize her various literacies, Janette will explore them. Sensitive teachers like Beth Worth may notice them, too. But it is easy to be so enticed (as I was) by mainstream print-related values that other literacies are overlooked.

The Nature of Home Literacies

The case study children exhibit different uses of print and diverse literacies, for their literacies are products of their particular home environments and family cultures. Kelly's familiarity with overlapping talk and negotiation differs from Janette's well-reasoned arguments and Eric's quiet demonstrativeness. Their interactive styles, like their uses of print, depend on the routines, norms, and values that surround them in their families.

Yet all the home literacies share some common elements. They are informal, worked into the fabric of daily life. Families provide children with raw materials for learning without even being conscious of it. Learning is incidental and vicarious -- as language learning is for the young child (Smith 1988).

Further, the family literacies (and the children's home literacies) grow out of relationships among family members. Parental histories affect the ways the families play out their multiple literacies. Some parental behaviors are unconscious, learned
in their own childhood homes. Others are conscious reactions to the adults' own upbringings; sometimes parents have chosen to promote literacies and values learned from their parents, while at other times they have made purposeful decisions to change.

**The Informality of Home Literacies**

Perhaps the most glaring difference between the literacies promoted in school and those acted out in homes is that the former are so much more structured, conscious, and formal. At home, literacies -- whether print, interactive, or involving other media -- are woven into the daily fabric of life. They are embedded in activities and relationships. Thus Eric and Kelly both claim they do not write or read at home, even though they do. The reading and writing they do is so functional that it becomes incidental and it goes unnoticed. Janette can more readily identify her uses of print literacy because some of them are more conscious, more labeled as literacy events. For example, she reads at bedtime; her parents set that routine when she was an infant. Yet her affinity for reading has led her to choose it as an activity at other times besides bedtime -- times which are less formally bounded. Because of her choosing it, she becomes aware of her use of that literacy. Pleasure reading (and writing), like functional reading and writing, becomes embedded in Janette's day, part of the flow of her life.

Other literacies, like hardly-noticed functional uses of print, may seem unremarkable to the families who practice them. Family members can describe their literacies and explain them, but they do not see them as anything special. Such literacies may have some special or bounded time frames in which they are practiced.
(for example, Eric and his dad did much of their woodworking right after supper)
much as Janette's pleasure reading had a regular time slot before bed. But like
Janette's reading, a particular literacy sometimes spills out into other times when it is
less noticed.

Eric's woodworking, for example, is restricted to the workshop because of its
dependence on the tools that can be used only there. Often, it is limited to the time
slot after supper when Russell is home. But Eric's woodworking literacy spills over
into other, more informal situations, when he does not think of himself as using his
ability with tools. He simply does it. This occurred when he was fixing his train set
or his bike. He may not have been working with wood, but he was using the skills
learned in that other literacy to apply them as needed in his life. A person who is
truly literate performs like that, using the literacy as appropriate, applying it in new
situations and with new media, using it almost casually and often without even
recognizing the skill involved.

Kelly's consumer literacy and Janette's artistic literacy are much the same as
Eric's woodworking. They use them as needed, comfortably and incidentally. Is that
not a measure of true literacy -- that one can apply it in new situations as needed?
Thus, a child is print literate only when he or she applies reading learned at school in
real ways, such as reading for needed information or choosing to read for enjoyment.
Calling out the words in a basal reader is not a sufficient test of a child's print
literacy.

Janette's art and Kelly's consumer awareness are other literacies which appear
to have come to them from casual exposure and ongoing opportunities to practice
them. There was some instruction (such as Kelly's mother showing her what to look for as listed on a coupon), but it was brief and given in the context of the situation. Eric's knowledge of vehicles came about in a similar way. But the informality of daily literacies does not necessarily mean that they are *always* informal. Eric has learned what he knows of woodworking, for example, in a more conscious learning situation. The learning, however, is still informal in contrast to most school learning. It is side by side, learned by watching, then trying. Though the learning situation may be separated in time and location from other family activities, it remains essentially informal in nature.

**The Interactive Nature of Home Literacies**

As I learned more about the case study children and their families, I was continually struck by the importance of their relationships within their families. Kelly's placement as a middle child, identified by her mother as a significant factor in her life, provides a good example of the way relationships affect the literacies which are learned. The three McCormack girls, so close in age to one another, spend much time together. They jostle for position, banter with one another, constantly collaborating and negotiating. Kelly has become a good negotiator and reader of people almost by necessity. Yet it is not only Kelly's middle placement that has led her to develop those skills. Her mother has provided an example, too. Talk is highly valued in her household. Carol clearly states her feelings and beliefs to her girls. She is unafraid to be an authority figure, yet she allows the children to see how her views sometimes differ from their father's. They sometimes see her negotiating with Kevin, and they hear her reasons for the decisions she makes about what is acceptable.
and unacceptable regarding their own behavior. Kelly's interactive literacies parallel her mother's.

Likewise, Janette's unusually mature sensitivities toward others appear to stem from her mother's example and her mother's close relationship with her. From an early age, Janette has been called "a wise soul," for she exhibits unusual understanding of and empathy for others. Both her parents are caring people, unafraid to say what they think and feel, but, especially in her preschool years, Janette has spent most of her time with her mother. Donna has an even temper and quiet manner, much like the personality Janette has developed. Janette's quiet advice to her brother when he complained that a friend didn't like him ("Just get along, okay?") seemed like something her mother would say. Meanwhile, her brother John's behavior more closely resembles her father's impulsive, highly active manner. Janette has a fiery side, but she does not display it at school. Appropriately, she is most outspoken and assertive with her father, as if she is trying on a skill she knows he has and values. Her family teases her she should become a lawyer, which surprises Beth Worth, who hasn't seen such strong-mindedness at school. Janette is more comfortable showing a calmer face at school.

Eric, too, has learned interactive behaviors from his parent. In his case, a close relationship with his father provides a model and gives him an identity with the active outdoor life of men in a rural culture. In that culture, words are less important than actions. Eric likes to do things, to be in motion. Vera John-Steiner quotes Piaget to explain motion as an expressive, meaning-making system from early childhood, during the sensorimotor stage:
...during the first year and a half or so, a Copernican revolution takes place, in the sense that now the child's own body is no longer the center, but has become an object among objects, and objects are now related to each other by either causal relationships, or spatial relationships, in a coherent space that englobes them all. All of these basic changes take place before there is any language, which demonstrates to what an extent knowledge is tied to actions, and not only to verbalizations. (Evans 1973, quoted in John-Steiner 1987, 15)

In the life of the child, language comes later. While some societies continue to value movement as an expressive system, western societies value language more highly. Kinesthetic and physical activities, like the fine arts, tend to be relegated to the periphery of the curriculum: twice a week gym class, after-school sports, an occasional play or skit. Dance is seldom seen at all in elementary school, unless as part of movement in music class. But sports and the arts are at least recognized. Other kinds of kinesthetic and physical literacies -- certain crafts or running games -- are not even thought of as expressive literacies. Children like Eric have a hard time in our schools because their literacies are not only different from the mainstream, but they are often invisible to the mainstream.

Another lesson to be learned from the interactive nature of children's home literacies is the importance of allowing talk as a learning tool in school. Kelly's third grade experience, in which talk was forbidden as a classroom tool, was difficult and unpleasant for her. On the one hand, talk is tied to self-esteem for her; it is her way of relating to and being accepted by others. On the other hand, she uses talk to learn, both by thinking out loud and by collaborating with others.

Vera John Steiner, writing of highly creative individuals, shows how childhood exposure to particular activities and ways of thinking (what I would call literacies) influenced the course of their lives. She states, "[I]n all fields, the personal
interest of a caring and knowledgeable adult is critical, just as it is in encouraging youngsters to reach their potential." (1987, 37) Many of the major innovators John-Steiner interviewed comment on early experiences with their parents, often not realizing until much later how influential those times were. Chomsky, for example, developed a familiarity with ideas about language "gathered, without much conscious awareness from his work with his father..." (John-Steiner, 1973, 39) John-Steiner asserts that these early activities "depict for us the ways in which they were filling up, in their youth, some invisible notebooks in their minds...The shape of their more conscious efforts cannot be determined at such an early stage, but in their youth they collect some of the raw material they will draw on later." (1973, 42)

While most people do not become pathfinders and innovators like the people John-Steiner studied, their creativities, too, grow from early experiences -- relationships and raw materials. As children play and as they are surrounded by the ideas and activities of their families and their culture, they form their first literacies, and they are given the raw materials for their future expressions of thought and creativity.

Conservation and Change

Clearly, relationships with parents strongly impact the development of children's multiple literacies. How are such literacies passed from generation to generation?

In her study of family literacy, Denny Taylor found that families' "rituals and routines" (1983, 7) of literacy were sometimes influenced directly, but more often indirectly, by the past experiences of the parents. Parents practiced conservation of
some activities and values that their parents had transmitted to them (sometimes consciously, sometimes not), and they decided to change others. "In each of the families, the evolution of literacy transmission is highly dependent on the interplay of their individual biographies and educative styles." (1983, 12)

Denise Eldredge spoke positively of the values her family and schooling gave her -- respect for elders, discipline -- and wished the same values to result from her son's education and upbringing. Her husband, Russell, told several stories which indicated that he reacted to his son as his father had reacted to him (such as occasions when he "learned his lesson" and that was deemed sufficient punishment for misuse of equipment). As Russell learned working beside his father and trying things, Eric learns alongside Russell. These men have knowledge but find little need to speak of it; they move and do. Actions lead to visible consequences; there is no need to restate them in words. Such values and literacies are passed down from one generation to the next.

Carol McCormack also identified values and literacies she observed in their childhood homes and wished to keep; she spoke favorably of her parents as readers. The Dumonts, likewise, remembered some positive moments -- parents reading the newspaper or, on one memorable occasion, Donna's father reading a storybook aloud. But the Dumonts and Carol McCormack spoke more clearly of contrasts between their parenting styles and those of their parents. Both Donna Dumont and Carol McCormack indicated that they wanted to listen better to their children than they felt their parents had done and that they wanted to accept their children's feelings. Art Dumont implied that he wished his home to be more print literate than his childhood
home had been. Donna spoke against the amount of television in her home growing up; she and Art carefully limited what their children could watch, and they often watched shows as a family.

Parental values regarding education also affect the aspirations of their children. The McCormack girls assume they'll go to college because their father assumes they will. Carol hopes they will, but she will not insist if they choose otherwise; she remembers how much she wanted her parents to accept the decisions she made for her own life. The Dumont children also expect to go to college, although Art has told Janette she will need scholarships or will have to pay for it herself. He and Donna paid their own way through college, and he feels children will appreciate their college education more if they work hard for it. Russell Eldredge hopes his son will graduate from the vocational high school, and Eric looks forward to it, though Denise wishes Eric would keep more options open and maybe go to college.

These parental value decisions affect the print literacy, the interactive literacies, and the other literacies which their children develop. For example, Dumonts acknowledge their children's feelings, even when they assert parental authority which goes against the child's wishes. (An example was the time Art affirmed John's feelings, but insisted John attend the museum program, even though he did not want to.) Such openness creates an atmosphere where feelings are safe to express, even when the result is not as one might wish. These values provide a framework in which the child can both acknowledge sadness and accept it (as Janette has come to terms with her grandmother's death), and they no doubt influence
Janette's awareness of others' feelings. Eric's demonstrativeness and Kelly's verbal facility are indirect products of their parents' upbringing and choices about their parenting.

**Bringing Home Literacies to School**

What can we do to uncover and celebrate children's home literacies in schools? How can schools use children's home literacies to help them learn more? Children develop literacies at home informally and interactively -- through exposure and practice in contexts which seem "natural." What does that suggest for schooling, and, in particular, what are the implications for learning to be print literate?

I'd like to look at the ways each the case study children display their home literacies in school, before turning to a consideration of some implications.

**The Case Study Children at School**

As he does at home, Eric likes hands-on projects in school in which he can learn by watching and by trying things. When such projects are linked to reading and writing (as special art) or to real-world work (such as lunch count), Eric's investment in the task grows. In school, Kelly does best in situations closest to family life -- small groups. Sometimes in school, she thinks out loud. Often, she does this as she asked for reassurance from an adult, but usually she answers her own questions. The talk and the connectedness to someone else seem to help her. Talk is important because it helps her think, and it also helps her build and sustain friendships, just as it does at home. Janette's print literacies find an easy home in school, yet she seems to be feeling society's pressure to be a "good girl." Though she willingly expresses her opinion at home, she remains somewhat quiet and guarded at school and with me.
Though she likes to do well, she does not show the same exuberance or have the same willingness to enter into confrontational discussions as she does at home.

The children use talk differently. Eric talks sparingly, using it primarily to tell a story or to get things done. Kelly, in contrast, chatters almost constantly, collaborating and negotiating with friends or siblings, using talk to build and cement relationships and to learn. Janette, forthright and outspoken at home and in close interactions, maintains a quiet academic personality in the large class at school.

With all the children, it is difficult to extract particular literacies and examine them as single entities. Literacies — ways of meaning-making — are embedded in a complex web of interests, aptitudes, relationships, and ways of interacting with the world. Janette's sensitivity, Kelly's reading of people, Eric's preference for demonstration over explanation — each is woven into many of the child's interactions and learning events.

Though each literacy is entwined with others, a child's comfort in a particular literacy does sometimes help the child bridge to print literacy. For example, Kelly uses talk to ask for advice on her spelling, but she then usually corrects the spelling by herself. The saying of it appears to help her, as well as the comfort of the supportive relationship with an adult. Similarly, Janette's sensitivity to others helps her read characters' motivations. Eric is willing, even eager, to write about vehicles and activities in New Hampshire; those stories are tied to things he knows well, things he could show others by writing about them. Likewise, he puts tremendous effort into reading and writing what he needs to know in special art, an area in which he may start from his strength in hands-on activity.
**Invisible Literacies**

Schools, even good ones like the Lincoln School, have blind spots. They don't see and use all that children know. This is particularly obvious in the case of Eric. In their verbocentricity, elementary schools provide few of the opportunities for action, for *doing*, with which Eric is so familiar. And elementary schools are generally arranged in ways which offer little congruence with the masculine comraderie Eric finds in the rural weekend culture of his family. His knowledge -- his literacies -- are hard to see at school because they differ from the mainstream. Likewise, some schools and teachers restrict children's interactive literacies, as Kelly's former school did. Unable to use talking to learn, and unable to relate with her teacher, Kelly spent two unhappy and largely unsuccessful years in school.

Many studies have shown how schooling practices discriminate, usually unconsciously, against children from lower socioeconomic levels. Scholars have shown how such children fill lower tracks in school (Oakes, 1985) or lower levels of traditional basal reading groups (Shannon, 1989). Children from minority ethnic groups are often seen as deficient because their communicative styles are misunderstood by mainstream teachers (Michaels, 1981; Gee, 1989a).

American public schools, under mandate to educate all children, have slipped into curricula that try to educate everyone the same way and according to similar curricula throughout the country. Recent calls for development of national standards and accountability add to the pressures for schools to conform to one another, to "cover" "the basics" and to teach those things which can easily be measured on national standardized tests. Our society asks that schools teach children to be literate,
but values only certain literacies and remains uncertain of how to develop others, leading to the irony that our diverse society does not know how to value and celebrate diversity. Instead it devalues the literacies of children who differ from the mainstream. While Eric's taciturnity and his difficulties reading and writing are seen as deficit, my inability with woodworking and my lack of knowledge about how a car engine works (areas in which Eric's knowledge surpasses mine) have never been criticized (or even noticed) in all my years of schooling. Schools, like the society at large, value particular skills and literacies more than others. Those of the mainstream are privileged, while those of minorities or "lower" middle classes are undervalued or ignored.

There is another class issue: that of parental involvement.

**Parental Involvement and Class Issues**

Annette Lareau, in her study of parents' interactions with schools in an upper middle class neighborhood and a working class neighborhood, found wide differences in the ways families from the two socioeconomic levels interacted with schools (Lareau, 1989). The upper middle class parents were both more comfortable approaching the school and had more information about the operations of the school. Working class families, on the other hand, tended to see schooling strictly as the province of the school. They did not intervene as often as upper middle class parents, and were, in fact, often uncomfortable in schools, remembering their own childhood experiences.

Beth Worth (and most of the staff of the Lincoln School) made conscious efforts to reach out to parents and to make them feel welcome. The first week of
school, Beth sent to the parents a request for information about their children. She asked about particular areas of parental concern, as well as more mundane issues, such as how to contact the parents if she wished to keep a child after school. Most parents returned the questionnaire promptly. At the end of the first quarter, Beth held conferences with almost every family, and she included the child at the conference. Beth asked parents and child to comment on what they were proud of and what their goals were; then she added her own observations. Several of the parents commented to me how much they liked the format and how good the child had felt. Carol McCormack, however, had mixed feelings, because the presence of her daughter did restrict some of the comments she might have made or questions she might have asked.

Although all the families in my study participated in school life in these ways, there was clearly a greater level of involvement from the Dumont family. Both Dumont parents had been involved in the parent organization since Janette had entered the school. They knew more about the curriculum than the other parents and had a clearer sense of the how the curriculum worked. When I asked Carol McCormack and Diane Eldredge about the furniture arrangement in the classroom, they both commented on the clusters of desks and the couch, but they did not realize that the arrangement signified a vastly different teaching approach from the schools they had attended. Carol thought the children sat in groups by ability, whereas, in fact, Beth Worth seldom used ability grouping. The Dumonts had a clearer understanding of Ms. Worth's whole language orientation, partly because of their involvement over the years, and partly because they came into the classroom more
often. Art chaperoned several field trips, and when he made some items to donate to the school craft fair, he delivered them himself. Donna had just started working part time in the school office, so she stopped by sometimes after school. They saw themselves in partnership with the school and kept the school informed of important issues in their children's lives which might affect them. For example, when Janette's grandmother was ill, the Dumonts let the school know that Janette might be affected, and they periodically checked with the teacher to see how Janette was handling herself in school during that difficult time. The Dumonts' approach was more akin to the upper middle class parents Lareau studied.

What can schools do to promote better relationships between homes and schools in order to uncover and build on children's home literacies?

**Communication between Homes and Schools**

Schools need to form better partnerships with parents. Communications between home and school tend to be uni-directional -- from teacher to parent (Zuga, 1983). But it is possible to have communication in both directions.

The Lincoln School set aside some early-release days for the purpose of conferences with parents. Beth Worth invited the children to those conferences, and she used the time to solicit information from parent(s) and child, rather than just providing information to them. Such conferences are a start. In her study of first-graders' literacies, researcher Judith Fueyo and teacher Chris Gaudet developed a questionnaire in which they asked parents about children's play habits, reading/writing experiences, favorite toys and shows, artifacts, interests, and learning characteristics. There is often much information about children's literacies in a few
key family stories. (Examples: Janette's responses to her grandmother's illness, Kelly's confrontation of her father about the divorce, Eric's use of tools without permission.)

Teachers don't always make bridges to families in order to discover all they can about the children. This is partly the nature of the institution of school as we now know it. With the numbers of students each teacher has and the many demands on educators' time, it is difficult to build relationships with students' families. That is particularly true in working class and inner city neighborhoods where parents find it difficult to come to school, either because of their work schedules or their feelings about school. Teachers do not have the researchers' gift of time to visit homes and undertake extensive interviews, but they can use well-planned conferences and questionnaires.

Another approach is to involve parents in the classroom. Researchers Judith Solsken and Geri Willett from the University of Massachusetts have been working with teacher JoAnne Wilson Keenan on a project in which parents share their areas of expertise with the class. These range from hairdressing (a parent cut the teacher's hair!) to playing the drums or baking bread. As adults share their specialties, teachers often get glimpses of literacies and literacy practices important in the children's homes. (Solsken, et. al, 1992)

**Creating Contexts for Multiple literacies**

Better relationships between homes and schools are essential, especially for children outside the mainstream. But we also have to look at what we can do within the curriculum and within schools themselves to get a better understanding of the
range of our children's literacies. Cognitive psychologist Howard Gardner sees the need to broaden the opportunities for learning in school. He theorizes that humans possess seven different intelligences, and he writes,

> Individuals possess varying amounts of these intelligences and combine and use them in personal and idiosyncratic ways. Just as we all look different and exhibit different personalities, we all possess different kinds of minds. This fact has decisive implications, particularly ...for the ways in which we carry out educational endeavors. (1991, 81).

He goes on to assert, "an education built on multiple intelligences can be more effective than one built on just two intelligences. It can develop a wider range of talents, and it can make the standard curriculum accessible to a wider range of students." (1981, 81) What can schools do to promote development of multiple intelligences -- and multiple literacies?

**Expanding the Literate Environment**

We need a broader definition of a literate environment than we have had. Don Graves (1991), Jane Hansen (1987), Don Holdaway (1979), and many others have advocated print-rich environments in our schools. It has become common (though the practice is still not widespread enough) to see elementary school classrooms filled with trade books, lists and labels, posted directions, songs, and poetry. Beth Worth's classroom is such a place. But Beth's classroom goes beyond print literacy to include a wealth of artistic and craft supplies, so that students can integrate creative expressions other than writing into their studies. In addition, Beth's class has a workbench, musical instruments, computers, and tape recorders. Schools may need to provide such varied materials much more routinely -- perhaps by expanding school media centers to include art, musical, and craft supplies to be
shared throughout the school. Whatever the logistics, if schools are to be literate environments for multiple literacies, they need to provide the needed supplies and materials on a daily basis, not simply saving painting for a weekly art lesson or woodworking for middle school once a week.

Too often, the nature of the institution gets in the way of what we would like to do. By dividing the curriculum into subjects, we may limit children's opportunities to use the literacies they already have, so that print literate children continue to practice mainstream literacy without branching out, and others' talents are sometimes never discovered. Some schools integrate subject areas and encourage interweaving of literacies. We need to experiment with new configurations in which "subjects" are related in real ways and "specialist" teachers work in the classroom alongside regular classroom teachers.

**Time to Take Time**

Even when individual teachers are willing, institutional pressures often work against such flexible integration of varied forms of expression. Time is a factor. What has been described as "the shopping mall high school" (Power, 1986) has its counterpart in elementary and middle schools which are expected to teach drug awareness, personal safety, sex education, instrumental music lessons, and all kinds of other things, often in specified time slots with help from outside agencies or personnel. All such offerings are valid and valuable. In fact, the thesis of this paper is that such activities allow individuals' varied talents and literacies to show. The problem lies not in the subject matter of such "special" activities, but in the logistics
of scheduling them. They become separated from the "basic" curriculum, and the school day takes on a frantic, frustrating pace.

We need to rethink the way we use time in our schools. To truly tap into multiple literacies, we have to provide blocks of time, rather than the short segments (each assigned to a subject area) which are usually the norm. A system which integrates disciplines rather than separating them provides more time for exploration and reflection and, in the long run, may interweave more disciplines than our students currently explore.

**Reflective Teaching**

Nearly a century ago, John Dewey urged education based on experience, and he said, "[Educators] should know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worthwhile." (1938, 40) But creating an environment is not enough; the educator must interact with learners. Dewey critiqued traditional education:

[In traditional education,] [i]t was assumed that a certain set of conditions was intrinsically desirable, apart from its ability to evoke a certain quality of response in individuals. This lack of mutual adaptation made the process of teaching and learning accidental. Those to whom the provided conditions were suitable managed to learn. Others got on as best they could. Responsibility for selecting objective conditions carries with it, then, the responsibility for understanding the needs and capacities of the individuals who are learning at a given time. It is not enough that certain materials and methods have proved effective with other individuals at other times. (1938, 45-46)

Reflective teachers who can respond to the diverse needs and strengths of a varied population of students are called for.
As they plan environments for instruction and as they interact with students, teachers need to examine their beliefs, practices, and assumptions, considering what they wish to retain and which they wish to change. For just as parents consciously and unconsciously pass on values and literacies learned in their childhoods, so teachers pass on the values they have brought with them from their own past histories, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously. What are some of the literacies teachers have that they seldom call on in school? Are there literacies they practiced as children -- musical or artistic or mechanical -- which are now left to specialists in the school building or which do not make it into school at all? Are there literacies which helped them at home, but not at school? How can we take full advantage of these various literacies and share them with children? To fully explore children's literacies (and to include a fuller range of teachers' own literacies, too) requires reflective teachers who value diversity and creativity.

Bridging Literacies

Exploration of multiple literacies may help us build bridges for children to become more accomplished in other literacies, particularly in print literacies. Writing workshop, which was successful for all the case study children (in fact, for all the children in the class), shows that simply having the chance to write about what you know and care about can help a learner grow. Similarly, choosing reading material and selecting one's own interest areas to research can help children learn more about reading and research than if required topics are thrust upon them. The more we can open up the choices, using print literacy to support the children's other literacies, the more they will become print literate.
Howard Gardner says of the research he and his fellow researchers have undertaken at Project Spectrum (a study of preschoolers):

We have determined that even four-year-olds exhibit quite distinctive cognitive profiles or, one might say, distinctive configurations of intelligences. ...These differences, too, eventually exert profound effects upon the child as student, determining, for example, which "entry point" (a story, an image, a hands-on activity) is most likely to be effective for a given student in encounters with new material and, less happily, which concepts are likely to be confused with one another. (1991, 82)

Children need, then, to have options for "points of entry," opportunities to explore using different media and working with others, as well as reading and researching in books.

Judith Fueyo has noted how young children "transmediate" as they compose a piece of writing. They write letters, vocalize sounds (such as vehicle noises), draw, sing, and talk. She speaks of a Brian, a first-grade child, who "appears driven by physical manipulations of things: drawings, inked tire tracks, explosive sounds, and holes in his paper that he playfully explained...as 'the page blew up!'" (1990, 29)

Fueyo writes:

He's engaging in a kind of composing that I call transmediating and supralogical. It is transmediational because no single form (printed words, for example) dictates representational choices, i.e. the work is not "uniform" but is multiform! It is supralogical because the order of presentation is not critical, one thing does not necessitate another. Like a musician, Brian adds sound effects as needed. Like a painter, he is independent of linear composing, free to add a pumpkin here, an explosion there, and see what the effect might suggest next...It appears that he is applying visual art techniques to a verbal medium, much like the neophyte at clay frequently rolls out clay strips and outlines "a man," rather than exploits the plastic medium for its inherent three-dimensional potential. I won't fret over Brian's tenuous grip on printed text. Instead I'll validate his sensible strategies to temporarily bridge the gap between his printed and pictorial repertoires. (29-30)

First-graders like Brian are not expected to have a full grasp of the possibilities of print and so are allowed to draw and play and talk as they write. But
perhaps there is a lesson here for our work with older children, especially those who are not comfortable in print literacy. If some of their other literacies were validated in school, perhaps they could become more aware of what they know and how they know what they know. Those awarenesses may subsequently help such children with print. I see this as another kind of transmediating.

Let me give an example. When Eric built his sled, he just went and did it. He was not particularly aware of his thinking process and the decisions he had to make. But those thinking and decision-making processes were there. When I nudged Eric to tell me about what he had done, he began to verbalize his process. He still showed me what he had done, rather than telling me in any detail, but he had to revisit his creative process in order to demonstrate it to me. He had to reflect on his process and become more consciously aware of it. He also had to translate his bodily knowing and his mechanical literacies (in which he seemed to just know what to do) into words.

In writing workshops, teachers and children listen to each others' stories and then retell what they have heard. Such interactions frequently help child writers to realize what they know. They help children to reflect. Could we not use such techniques to explore what children know in their other literacies, too? As students tell (or show) us what they know, we reflect back what they teach us, and lead them toward further reflection. This reinforces whatever literacy they are exhibiting, and it leads them toward some of the things needed for print literacy, as well -- greater facility with words and more awareness of their own thought processes.
Unlike the unconscious, playful transmediation described by Fueyo, this kind of transmediation arises less spontaneously as a pathway toward new literacies. An outside agent (such as the teacher) facilitates the transmediation, the bridge from one literacy to another. Pushing Kelly to understand how she reads people or how she evaluates a television show may help her to think more critically about characters and themes in literature. Helping Eric to understand that he makes ongoing decisions as he fixes his bike or four-wheeler may give him a framework for understanding revision and the need to make the writing "work."

I do not mean merely pointing out parallels or using other literacies as metaphors for working with print. The literacies must be valued as themselves, not merely as routes to new literacies. The key, it appears to me, is developing an awareness in the children -- and in their teachers -- that they are already critical thinkers who are literate in different ways. The goal is to develop the same kinds of facility with new literacies. When Kelly can identify what she knows in one literacy, she may be able to use that knowledge in another literacy. Teachers frequently generalize about children who are "not reflective" or who "don't think," when, in fact, those children may be adept at reflective response and thinking in non-print (or even nonverbal) areas.

**Discovering Multiple Literacies**

How can a teacher discover a child's home literacies in the first place? As discussed above, better two-way communication between schools and homes will help. In Beth Worth's class, writing workshop offered a way for the children to
express some of their interests, thereby hinting at some of their literacies. Interest inventories from students and information from parents can provide information.

It is important to give children opportunities to learn together and to observe them in those settings. When students work cooperatively in small groups, they use literacies which may not be obvious in more traditional frameworks. This was true of Kelly's interactive literacy, and in small groups, Janette showed her leadership ability. She was able to be quietly assertive there in contrast to her reticent behavior in the large group. In small groups, she could use her sensitivities toward others and her ability to work cooperatively. Girls may especially need such opportunities, though some non-mainstream boys like Eric are more comfortable in small groups, too.

Another promising way to discover and promote multiple literacies and reflectiveness is through portfolios. Typically, portfolios are collections of student work which demonstrate student performance in school, but the the Manchester portfolio project, directed by Jane Hansen and William Wansart of the University of New Hampshire, found its best results when it expanded the notion of portfolio beyond school work and invited children to make portraits of themselves as people. (Hansen 1992). The portfolio thus became a vehicle for self-knowledge and expression, and a validation of children's multiple literacies, including those which might not show up in school. Such portfolios are tools for self-evaluation and reflection.

Informality and Interaction: Creating a "Learning Home"

Two major characteristics of children's home literacies were informality (meanings embedded in context) and interaction (learning as a social process
entwined with relationships). In Beth's "whole language" classroom, literacy expressions — print and nonprint — were often embedded in other activities, rather than set up as abstract exercises. Thus, children wrote and read and drew and built things related to areas of study, in informal work situations throughout the day.

Beth Worth recognized the importance of relationships, though she was not trying to recreate the relationships children experienced at home. She clearly cared for the children and tailored her reactions to the children based on their behaviors and what she perceived as their needs. Thus, she was firm with Paul and set limits regarding violence in his stories. She gave Ramon many positive strokes and a great deal of individual help. She invited Kelly to help after school. Likewise, she strived to create a classroom community, through emphasis on respecting each other, sharing ideas, and working things out. Much of the day was structured to allow for interactive learning in small groups or informal partnerships. In fact, Beth told me, "The class becomes a culture and it becomes a family...I see this as so important." She wanted to create a "learning home."

Thus, Beth tried to provide opportunities for learning which were embedded in real situations — presentations to others, creations of products — rather than abstract exercises or requirements which fit the school's academic requirements but ignored real-world contexts. Fueyo says, "the language arts classroom needs to support and celebrate the child on all levels of meaning-making. This means that we must all ask, How many ways are available for this child to make meaning? before we ask, What does this child know?" (1990, 202)
But a learning home is more than a place which offers multiple avenues for expression. In *The School home*, Jane Roland Martin (1992) argues for schools as caring communities, in which everyone shares domestic, as well as learning, responsibilities. Beth Worth, too, emphasized and understood the importance of relationships and community. These are positive ways to parallel some of the elements of home literacy learning. Many years ago, Dewey urged that we organize our schools around meaningful experiences related to the community. When we fully take his advice, more children will have a chance to use a fuller range of their literacies.

**Re-envisioning Schools: Fields of Possibilities**

which lead to real understanding and critical thinking. He also advocates apprenticeships, such as mentoring programs in which children learn side-by-side with expert practitioners of the things they are trying to learn.

Greene suggests that when we limit individuals' freedoms to "choose themselves" (whether it be restricted opportunities for women or people facing political oppressions), we limit the relationships and possibilities in our society.

Speaking of education's emphasis on cognition, Greene says:

The problem with this highly cognitive focus in the classroom has to do in part with what it excludes. Also, it has to do with whether or not reasoning is enough when it comes to acting in a resistant world, or opening fields of possibilities among which people may choose to choose. (1988, 119)

Greene advocates instead "connected teaching" which Nel Noddings also advocates, in which

"the caring teacher tries to look through students' eyes, to struggle with them as subjects in search of their own projects, their own ways of making sense in the world. Reflectiveness, even logical thinking remain important; but the
point of cognitive development is not to gain an increasingly complete grasp of abstract principles. It is to interpret from as many vantage points as possible lived experience, the ways there are of being in the world." (120)

To help children to explore their own field of possibilities -- to make their own choices and take responsibility for those choices -- our classrooms must be places which offer choices and explorations. I suggest that giving children the freedom to work from the literacies they have developed at home will bring new "fields of possibilities" into the classroom. This affirms the value of every learner, every citizen. Such celebration of diversity expands the opportunity for freedom within the classroom community and into the larger world.

Curriculum which open up to provide a "field of possibilities" for students affect teachers, as well. Teachers must be "reflective practitioners" (Schon 1983). Teachers need opportunities for collaboration, time to observe each other and reflect on what's happening. My ongoing converstaions with Beth Worth were some of the richest times of my research. Her ideas sparked mine, as mine influenced hers. A professional community for teachers is as essential as a classroom community for the students.

**Questions and the Need for Further Research**

I began this study with a teacher's questions, and I end it with a researcher's questions. I came to know three children well, but I wonder: what are the literacies of other children? How do they ressemble the literacies of the case study children and how do they differ? In families where the child does not have a secure relationship with a parent, what kinds of literacies does the child develop within the home, extended family, and community? We need more close studies of children and
their print and non-print literacies. It would be fascinating to study the literacies of several children within one family to see how they are similar and how they differ.

We especially need to know more about non-verbal thinking -- not only the mechanical literacies of a child like Eric, but of artistic and athletic literacies. How does a person make and control and reflect on the bodily motions which appear to be intuitive and natural, but which have somehow been learned? John-Steiner (1985) has given us some good information on this. We need more, particularly about children. Most useful would be observations of children as they work and learn in their homes (or in the larger community). Think-aloud protocols might give us some information, though some knowledge is action-oriented, and children may not be able to explain their thinking in words. When children are learning from adults (as Eric learned woodworking from his father), the adult may be able to offer perspectives on the current situation and on his or her own childhood learning.

There are a host of gender-related issues to explore. The three case study children were strongly influenced by their relationships and identifications with the same sex parent. To what extent is that true of other children their age? What does this mean for girls who have no mothers or boys who do not live with their fathers? What about the gender issues that are played out in classrooms? Are girls constrained from developing particular literacies, while boys are limited in others? We need more research on gender-related issues as related to literacies development -- particularly participant-observation and in-depth interviews about attitudes.

We need to know more about effective ways to incorporate multiple literacies into our schools. How can we use a child's particular non-print literacy to help him
or her learn other literacies, including print literacy? What are the thinking processes of various literacies and how do they relate to reading, writing, and speaking? We need much more research on classroom practice that encourages working and thinking across multiple literacies.

Such questions can lead us to closely observe children and to help them toward fuller expressions of all their literacies — as we strive for schools that are truly "learning homes" and "fields of possibilities" for all our children.
REFERENCES


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