You go to b ab t rod the 16 levo *[You got to be able to read the 16 level]:* Derek's Literacy Learning Story in First Grade

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the co-constructed nature of classroom life, and what became constituted as one child's story of literacy learning in first grade. It takes an over-time look at how opportunities for literacy learning were constructed within multiple, intermingling contexts (classroom, school, district, and family). Derek's literacy learning story illuminates and illustrates the nature of (a) literacy learning as a negotiated process across multiple layers of context, (b) teaching decisions addressing an individual child as negotiating multiple perspectives and expectations, and (c) a definition of literacy as constituted by the negotiation of contexts, perspectives, and expectations.

Literacy learning in classrooms is a complex and problematic construct (Green & Bloome, 1997). A large body of research has contributed to different understandings of its nature and processes (Bloome, 1987; Clay, 1991; Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Ferreiro, 1990; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992, among others). Recent studies grounded in a sociocultural perspective have provided new theoretical and methodological lenses to examine literacy learning, teaching processes, and the nature of classroom life (e.g., Cochran-Smith, 1984; Collins & Green, 1992; Dyson, 1993; Heath, 1983; Solsken, 1993; Weade, 1992). Yet the dynamic nature of curriculum co-construction and what becomes constituted over time and across contexts as children's stories of literacy learning continue to need further examination.

As Weade (1992) put it, the "tensions created for students, teachers, and others who somehow manage to juggle the inherent contradictions in conflicting ideologies of classroom practice remain relatively unexplored" (p. 90). Few studies have taken a more comprehensive look at the interplay among the contexts in which literacy learning takes place (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Heath, 1983; Solsken, 1993). In the current political climate in education, there is a push for national standards, national education goals, and accountability measurements; and these demands create new tensions not only for teachers and administrators but also for students and their families. However, how the development of state- and district-level standards and assessments could shape and constrain what counts as literacy learning and teaching in the primary grades remains to be examined. Empirical research is needed that further extends a situated perspective (Green & Bloome, 1997), and examines the current interplay of local and larger contexts (for example, high-stakes assessments, mandates from legislatures, state-level guidelines for language arts programs, district-level guidelines, and proficiency standards) and their impact on the nature of literacy learning opportunities taking place at the classroom level. The purpose of this study was to examine the co-constructed nature of classroom life, and what became constituted as one child's story of literacy learning. To explore dynamic, rather than static, ways of examining classroom practices and the interplay of local and larger contexts, I took a comprehensive, over-time look at multiple contexts (classroom, school, district, and family) as opportunities for literacy learning were constructed in one classroom.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: THEORY AS CONTEXT FOR INQUIRY

A sociocultural perspective on the nature of learning and literacy learning formed the mental grid (Zaharlick & Green, 1991) or theoretical framework for this study, thus suggesting ways of conceptualizing literacy learning, guiding methodological assumptions and decisions, and creating a context for inquiry. From a sociocultural lens, literacy and the nature of the cognitive processes

involved in learning to read and write are constrained and shaped by socially constructed meanings and literacy practices. Scribner and Cole (1981) emphasize the socially organized nature of literacy practices as a process in which we learn not only how to read and write a specific script but also how to apply this knowledge for specific purposes in particularized contexts of use. Rather than being viewed as a fixed set of universal cognitive processes or an individual act and accomplishment, literacy learning and teaching is discussed within the social, cultural, historical, and political contexts in which it occurs. Further, literacy is viewed as encompassing multiple literacies (with multiple ways of being literate) instead of a single definition of literacy. Literacy involves varied discourses, ways of using language, and participating in socially and culturally situated practices and actions that can vary across situations both within and across settings, cultures, and communities (Bloome & Green, 1992).

Classroom-based ethnographic studies have described ways in which children socialize in particular literacy practices and literacy communities within the classroom (Kantor, Miller, & Fernie, 1992; Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, 1992). Taking a situated perspective (Green & Meyer, 1991; Heap, 1991), these studies view literacy learning and teaching processes as located within the ongoing stream of everyday classroom life. Learning and teaching processes are described as taking place in a complex and evolving social context and are situationally defined in the patterns of classroom life co-constructed by teachers and students in their particular classrooms (Collins & Green, 1992; Weade, 1992). In this study, building on a situated perspective, I take a more comprehensive look at literacy learning processes to empirically examine the larger series of contexts (and texts) that students draw upon as resources and frames to guide learning, meaning making, and participation in classroom literacy practices.

METHODOLOGY

The processes of data collection and analysis were guided by an interpretive approach (Erickson, 1986; Gaskin, Miller & Corsaro, 1992) and ethnographic perspective (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Zaharlick & Green, 1991). An interpretive approach to inquiry best suited this study's questions and conceptual framework because of its focus on phenomenon and meaning making as situated historically, socially, and culturally (Graue & Walsh, 1998). I adopted an ethnographic perspective because of its sociocultural substantiality (Hymes, 1982) and its focus on making visible the nature of literacy learning processes as constructed by and from the perspectives of classroom members (teacher and students). I also used the concept of intertextuality (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Floriani, 1997) and a dialogic view of the interdependence among contexts (Rogoff, 1995) as frameworks for analyzing and interpreting the interplay

and influence of multiple contexts (and their texts) in the nature of co-constructed literacy practices. I viewed classroom literacy events or practices as texts, written by students and teacher in and through their oral and written actions and interactions (Collins & Green, 1992). Further, texts not only consist of oral and written forms, but also can be read and written through other types of symbols and actions embedded in social practice and institutions that affect the ways in which classroom literacy practices are defined. Thus, I examined literacy learning as representing the juxtaposition of multiple contexts and the texts written by the learner through that learner's actions and interactions within classroom literacy practices and other experiences outside the classroom. As Lemke (1995) emphasizes, a text [and context] is not "complete or autonomous in itself: it needs to be read, and it is read, in relation to other texts [and contexts]" (p. 41).

In this study, I examined the processes involved as one student gained access to and actively participated in classroom literacy practices and how opportunities for literacy learning and teaching were co-constructed by classroom members. I also investigated how this student made sense of and engaged in literacy practices at the individual and collective level. Of particular interest was how opportunities for literacy learning were constructed over time and across contexts (i.e., classroom, school, district, and family). These questions served as preliminary frames for my data collection and analysis.

Context of the Study

This closer look at the literacy learning story of one student, Derek,* is part of a larger, yearlong study investigating literacy learning and teaching processes in a first-grade classroom (Dantas, 1999). The data were collected in a K–4 public school serving a lower- to lower-middle-income community located in a small Midwestern city (19,000 population). The school, which is a professional development site affiliated with a large university, has a history of child-centered education and a focus on integrated and literature-based curriculum. The teacher, Julie Boyd, has lived in the school's city for over 20 years and has taught in the school for 14 years. She is an experienced teacher who viewed the research project as an opportunity for professional development and reflection on her teaching. Mrs. Boyd started the year with a group of 26 students and ended with a group of 23 students. A total of 27 students participated in this study. During the first month of school, Mrs. Boyd and I selected a group of seven focal students using maximum variation sampling (Patton, 1990). The stories of each of the seven focal students were unique and complex; however,

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* Pseudonyms have been used for the names of the student and teacher to
  ensure confidentiality.

limitations on the scope of this study led me to focus on the story of one student. Derek lived with his family (mother, father, and younger brother) and had attended kindergarten at this school. He lived outside the school's attendance area, and his parents drove him to school every day. His mother was actively involved in the school's parent and teacher association, and both parents worked hard at their own private business in order to maintain the family's lower-middle income.

Data Sources

The process of data collection took place before the school year began while classrooms were being set up, and it continued until the end of the school year. I used a range of ethnographic tools to collect data in the classroom: participant observation, field notes, video and audio taping, informal interviews with students and teacher, collection of documents and artifacts, and photographs of classroom activities. I also observed particular school activities, collected school and district documents, and met with families formally and informally at home and at school. Data sources include (a) classroom observations for 63 days; (b) observations of school activities over the school year including staff meetings, recess activities, the school's Early Reading Intervention program, and specials; (c) journal writing with the teacher (notebook form and e-mail communication); (d) one visit with the teacher to Derek's home and two interviews with Derek's mother at school; (e) informal contact with Derek and his family after school or at school events (open house, parent night, family literacy night, parent conference, student-led conference, one field trip, Kids Invite Someone Special [K.I.S.S.] tea day, and field day); and (f) school, district, and state documents.

Data Analysis

The data analysis involved a recursive, iterative (Graue & Walsh, 1998), and ongoing process. This process informed data collection decisions in terms of why and when to collect data as well as how and which data collection procedures to use. It involved varied levels of analysis within a reflexive process of interpretation that illuminated the multiple meanings (Denzin, 1994) of an action, interaction, event, or artifact. Contextual validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was possible through the triangulation of multiple data sources. Prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing were techniques used to establish the credibility of findings and interpretations.

This study focuses on two levels of analysis: the identification of the layers of context and discursive practices that shaped classroom interactional spaces and the analysis and juxtaposition of the interaction among contexts by tracing

one child's literacy learning story. The concept of tracer units (Dantas, 1999; Kantor, Elgas, & Fernie, 1993) is used as an interpretive element and analytical tool to examine the influence of multiple contexts (and texts) on the nature of literacy learning as it is co-constructed over time. Highlighted in this analysis are two themes: the multilayered and interdependent nature of contexts in which literacy learning is embedded and situated and the negotiated, co-constructed, and situated nature of classroom opportunities for literacy learning. See Dantas (1999) for a more detailed description of each layer of context examined and the organizational patterns of classroom interactional spaces (Heras, 1993) involving literacy events and practices, as well as an analysis of three tracer units, which examine other important aspects of classroom literacy practices (a group event, a curriculum piece, and assessment).

FINDINGS

In this section, I briefly describe the contexts that influenced and were used as frames of reference in the opportunities for literacy learning created in the classroom. I then describe and discuss Derek's classroom and school life and his experiences outside of school. Derek's story is used as a snapshot taken in the flow of classroom life that allows us to examine the nature of the contexts in which literacy learning is embedded and situated, as well as how a particular child engages in and constructs opportunities for literacy learning.

What Counts as Learning Context

A definition of classroom context as multilayered is critical to the understanding of the nature of literacy learning in Julie Boyd's classroom. Throughout the year, opportunities for classroom literacy learning and teaching were supported and constrained by all contexts outside the classroom and by interactional spaces (Heras, 1993) built inside the classroom. Interactional spaces involved shared meanings and definitions of social appropriateness marked by distinct patterns of organization of time and space, use of materials, purpose, and interactional norms (Cochran-Smith, 1984) and forms of discourse and social activity. They were created and constituted in relation to, embedded within, and taking into account the district, community, family, and school contexts. For example, in the classroom's meeting area, literacy events such as independent reading time and read-aloud activities followed predictable participant structures (Phillips, 1972), or ways of participating socially and linguistically, in which literacy practices were introduced and practiced at the individual and collective level. In these interactional spaces, literacy learning took place along with an evolving classroom community in which students and teacher in interaction became contexts for each other (Erickson & Schultz, 1997).

The contexts outside the classroom include societal influences such as soci-ocultural values, the history of public education in the United States, the national standards-based reform movement, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), national and state legislation, the public debate over whole language versus phonics approaches to reading instruction, and other influences. In this study, the focus was on three layers of context outside the classroom: the district, the family (and community), and the school. The classroom context and the ways in which literacy was framed and defined (through opportunities for literacy learning and teaching) were embedded and situated within these outside layers. Figure 1 displays these contexts as physical spaces. Dashes are used to indicate communication between contexts although they do not fully illustrate the permeability and co-constructed relationship among them which is addressed in the analysis of Derek's literacy learning story. The classroom is situated in the center in order to display its embeddedness within other contexts.

There is a level of hierarchy between the district's decisions and guidelines and the school, classroom, community, and family contexts. For example, assessment requirements and new reading and writing proficiency standards determined the school and classroom's assessment schedule and selection of assessment measures. In addition, raised writing and reading proficiency stan-dards (e.g., increasing the benchmark text reading level for end-of-year first grade from 12 to 14) distributed the pressure of preparing students for the fourth-grade reading proficiency test among all the primary grade teachers. These new standards created new tensions for families and students who became concerned with reaching specific book levels and meeting proficiency standards. The district's decisions were themselves a response to state-level guidelines on language arts curriculum, legislation on proficiency testing, and a fourth-grade reading guarantee (i.e., students who fail the reading portion of the state's fourth-grade proficiency test will be retained).

Nevertheless, in the interactional spaces built in the classroom, the teacher had many choices in her ongoing decision making, and students had the power to choose how to respond and interact in the classroom. Briefly described, Julie Boyd's daily decision-making process involved the orchestration of the district's course of study and assessment requirements; the school's philosophy, schedule, and resources; her students' interests, backgrounds, and needs; their families' expectations and backgrounds; and the organization of the classroom's physical space, time, and available material and human resources. This decision-making process was guided by her frames of reference (Green & Weade, 1987); theoret-ical and practical understandings of classroom practice, child development, and learning; and curriculum goals. At the same time, in the ongoing process of curriculum enactment, the students' frames of reference (e.g., interests, personal history, and literacy background) and their responses and needs (as determined

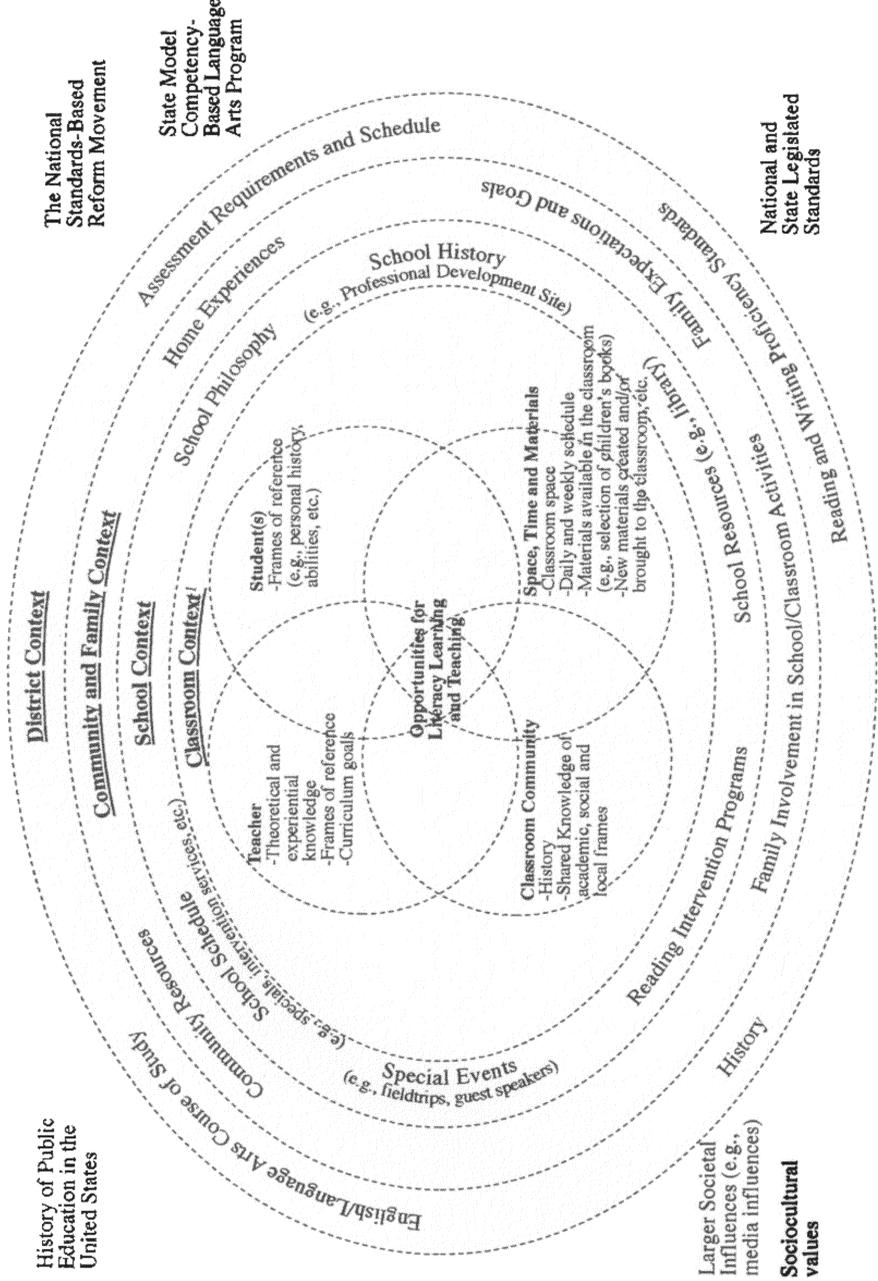by formal and informal assessments) also played a critical role.

Over the school year, Mrs. Boyd and her students became a classroom community who shared academic, social, and local knowledge as well as a history. Being part of a classroom community or social group involved the construction of local or situated meanings, and common knowledge of the roles and relationships, rights and responsibilities, and norms and expectations of appropriate participation in the classroom (Zaharlick & Green, 1991). Local and shared meanings allowed the implementation of and participation in daily or weekly classroom routines and activities (e.g., planned literacy events) and literacy and social practices. Classroom space, the daily schedule, the materials available in the classroom, and new materials also influenced the construction of local meanings and opportunities for literacy learning. As Figure 1 illustrates, opportunities for literacy learning and teaching were embedded within interactional spaces co-constructed and framed by the teacher, students, and classroom community within specific classroom spaces, materials, and time.

In the classroom, literacy learning and teaching were an important part of the complex web of personal and temporal interactions (Graue & Walsh, 1998) making up the classroom's daily life. Opportunities for literacy learning at the individual and collective levels took place in daily classroom practices in ongoing interactions between students and teacher and were not limited to those practices involving reading and writing. They were situated within interactional spaces created by the teacher, students, and classroom community (in particular, classroom spaces, materials, and time). These opportunities were embedded in a socially evolving context that reflected the district and state, the school, and community and family perspectives. Thus, what became constituted as the local space or learning context through the interactions and actions of classroom members at both the individual and collective levels reflected many texts and frames of reference related to what is defined as literacy learning.

Intermingling Contexts: Derek's Experiences at Home, School, and in the Classroom

Derek's story allows us to weave themes and portray the big picture of how they are interwoven. I trace Derek's literacy learning story by looking at (a) his life as a first grader, (b) his learning experiences outside school, (c) his family concerns and involvement, and (d) his interactions and relationship with his teacher. By tracing Derek's classroom life, I locate his literacy learning story within the web and ongoing stream of classroom life. Like Julie Boyd's decisions and actions (see Dantas, 1999), Derek too negotiated multiple layers of context located within the interactional spaces built at the classroom level and outside the classroom (i.e., his family and community, the school, and the district's proficiency expectations). His identity as a learner, reader, and writer in the classroom was

Figure 1.

The National
Standards-Based
Reform Movement

State Model
Competency-
**Based Language
Arts Program**

National and
State Legislated
Standards

History of Public
Education in the
United States

Larger Societal
Influences (e.g.,
media influences)

**Sociocultural
values**

District Context

Community and Family Context

School Context

Classroom Context

Assessment Requirements and Schedule

Home Experiences

School Philosophy

School History
(e.g., Professional Development Site)

Family Expectations and Goals

Proficiency Standards

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

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

Opportunities for
Literacy Learning
and Teaching

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

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

(e.g., Library)

Reading and Writing

School Resources

Family Involvement in School/Classroom Activities

Reading Intervention Programs

History

Community Resources

School Schedule

(e.g., specials, intervention services, etc.)

English/Language Arts Course of Study

Special Events
(e.g., fieldtrips, guest speakers)

constituted and co-constructed by the interdependence among multiple contexts. His parents' image and expectations of what constituted literacy learning were also situated and co-constructed within multiple layers of context. In this sense, it is necessary to take an over-time look across contexts to understand what becomes constituted as one story of literacy learning.

Figure 2 briefly summarizes the range of Derek's experiences in the classroom and at home and school over time. Although this figure separates Derek's experiences into three categories, in reality, Derek's literacy learning was supported and shaped by his actions and interactions in these contexts. In other words, Derek's literacy learning was influenced and shaped by his prior knowledge, personal goals and interests, his parents' involvement in school and classroom activities, his relationship with Mrs. Boyd, his participation in the Early Reading Initiative (ERI) program, his involvement in Cub Scouts, and other important events in his life.
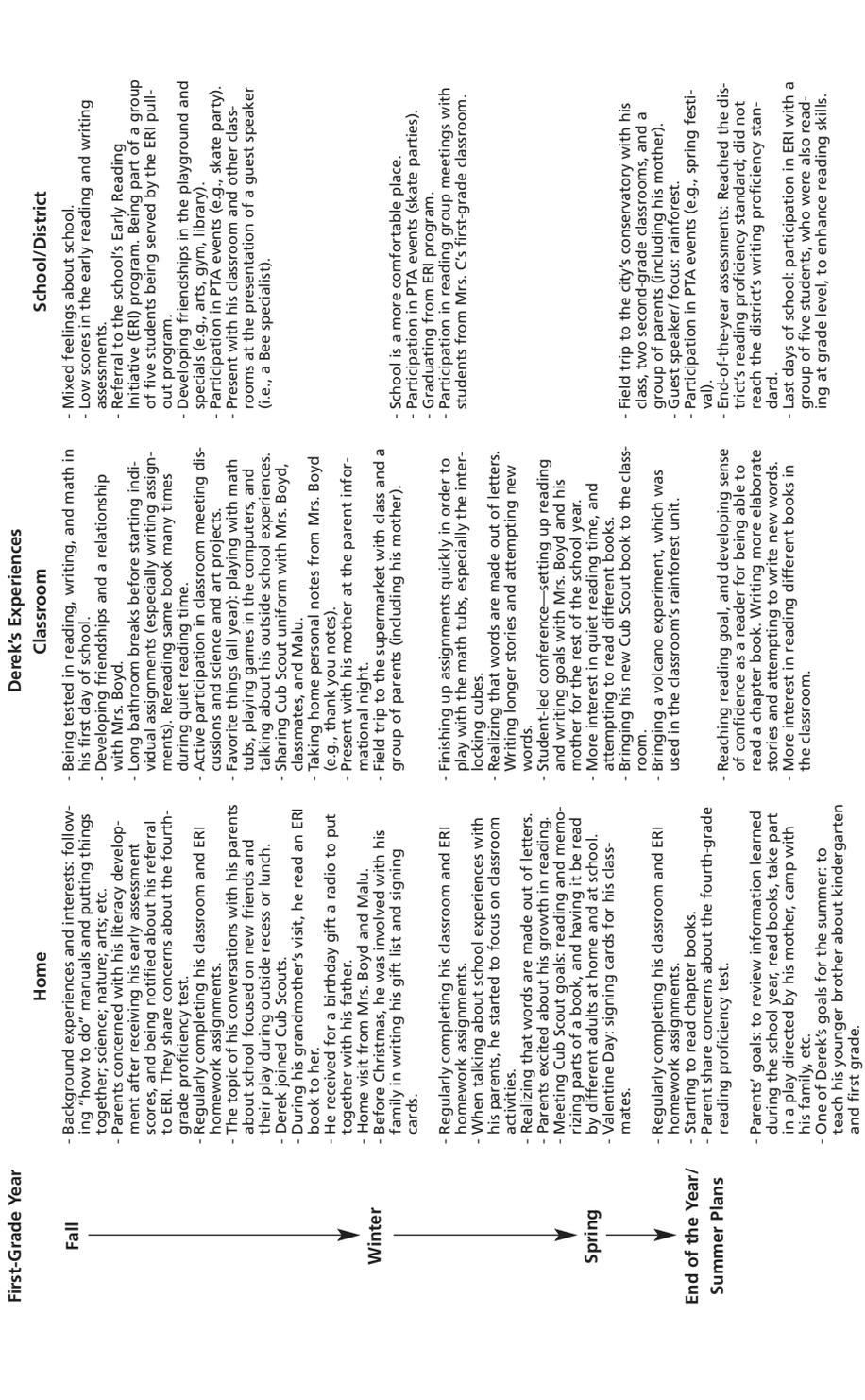
Derek's Life as a First Grader

When asked to write a letter to kindergartners about first grade during one of the last days of school, Derek wrote about things he liked to do such as the climbing wall in gym and his favorite math tub, the interlocking cubes (see copy of Derek's writing, page 13). He also wrote about things he did in first grade (i.e., work on math computers and do work). Derek did not forget to include in his letter that the kindergarten students would be expected to read at Text Level 16 in the following year—two text levels higher than the benchmark while he was in first grade. For Derek, being able to read at Level 14 (the benchmark when Derek finished first grade) became a personal, family, and teacher goal in his life as a first grader.

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

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

Figure 2. Intermingling Contexts: Brief Overview of Derek's Experiences at Home, School, and in the Classroom

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

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

Derek's scores in the early reading and writing assessments were among the lowest in his classroom. Based on his scores on four literacy tasks of Clay's (1993/2002) Observation Survey (letter identification = 41, writing vocabulary = 2, hearing and recording sounds in words = 1, and text reading level = A), he was referred to the school's ERI program. From September until March, he left the classroom every morning with a group of four other students. They stayed at the ERI program's room for half an hour, during part of the early morning's quiet work choice time (i.e., reading group, math computer, morning work choices, or learning centers) and the beginning of meeting time (i.e., shared reading, read aloud, interactive writing, calendar activities, and instructions for morning work time).

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

> *Journal Writing, February 1999*
>> [Derek] is enjoying this unit—his knowledge about penguins is amazing and he doesn't hesitate to make sure I have all the facts straight or to verbalize it in another way.

Derek also enjoyed talking and sharing about his extracurricular activities. In our conversations, he liked sharing his experiences working with his father at the family's copy shop and his Cub Scout activities.

When asked if he liked to read and write, Derek was open about not liking these activities despite the progress he had made by the end of the school year. Learning to read and write in order to achieve school proficiency standards was mostly a family goal for Derek. He set goals and celebrated his progress with his

Figure 3. Copy of Derek's Writing

parents. For example, late in the winter he shared with me his conversation with his mother about his graduation from the ERI program.

> *Audiotape, March 1999*
>> I'm ahead on reading now. My mom said that I'm the only one that can read a book [in my reading group] and that my reading teacher told her that I'll be out of reading group soon.

In the classroom's weekly or daily routines, Derek participated in a range of literacy practices that fostered opportunities for literacy learning. These learning opportunities took place in (a) planned literacy events (shared reading, interactive writing, reading group, silent reading, independent writing, group projects, assessment tasks, computer programs); (b) theme-based units (activities which took place during planned literacy events, as well as integrated arts, math, social studies, science, and health); (c) planned math events (calendar, group problem-solving activities, independent math assignments, math computer program, and computer games); (d) planned social routines (attendance and lunch count, directions for quiet work time, identification cards for math computers, take home folders, distribution of handouts for work assignments, checking responsibility chart and morning quiet work choice chart, and writing personal cards); and (e) informal social routines (participating in games, sharing books and other written materials, writing, and drawing).

In the winter, Derek was able to make sense of the relationship between words and letters. He realized that words are made of letters. From his mother's point of view, this realization was the turning point in his literacy learning in first grade. He became more motivated to attempt to read new books, as he better understood how written text operates. At the same time, at the classroom community level, being able to read a chapter book became an important sign of status within the students' peer culture (Corsaro, 1985). Being able to read a chapter book became an important goal to Derek. As his mother explained,

> *Audiotape, June 1999*
>> To him, those were real books…They're not those little baby books.

In February, during his conference with Mrs. Boyd and later in his student-led conference with his mother, Derek set as a reading goal to be able to read chapter books. Derek's responses to Mrs. Boyd's guiding questions (in bold below) were recorded in the same paper:

>> **In reading, I would like to get better** *at reading chapter books. We* [Mrs. Boyd and Derek] *talked about how he'd need to know more words. He feels better about reading now.* [italics indicate what Mrs. Boyd wrote with Derek]

With your parents, set a goal for reading. What can you do at home to help reach this goal? *Read* The Cat in the Hat *once every night. We would like to read a chapter book by the end of the year.* [italics indicate what Derek's mother wrote with him]

During the student-led conferences, he also set goals for writing with Mrs. Boyd and his mother. Derek's family involvement in his learning process is illustrated by the use of *we* in the goals set by him and his mother.

In writing, I would like to get better at *make me know the sounds easier this would help me spell new words.* [italics indicate what Mrs. Boyd wrote with Derek]

Set a goal for writing with his parents. How can you accomplish this goal? *We would like to know some new words by the end of the year and remember to put spaces in between the words.* [italics indicate what Derek's mother wrote with him]

Learning how to read only became Derek's personal goal when he was required by his Cub Scout group to read and memorize a sequence of paragraphs in his Cub Scout book. He read and repeated these paragraphs at home. At school he re-read them to himself, and he read them to a few classmates, to Mrs. Boyd, and to me. He also asked Mrs. Boyd to read a story from his Cub Scout book to the whole group during a shared reading classroom event.

According to Derek, he learned a lot in first grade. His end-of-the-year scores in four literacy tasks of the Observation Survey (Clay, 1993/2002) also confirm his progress (letter identification = 54, writing vocabulary = 39, hearing and recording sounds in words = 37, and text reading level = 16). During the last days of school, like other classmates, he was proud to share that he was able to read a chapter book:

Audiotape, May 1999
I'm reading chapters now…I finished one yesterday.

He showed me the book he had just finished reading, *Ghosts Don't Eat Potato Chips* (Dadey & Jones, 1992). Later he mentioned that he was reading his seventh chapter book. Nevertheless, when I asked if he liked to read, he answered quickly and emphatically:

Audiotape, May 1999
Ah…ah no, no. I don't like to read. No.

Derek's Learning Experiences Outside School

Derek's favorite thing to do outside school was to help his father in their copy

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

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

Derek enjoyed sharing things he brought from home. Late in September, Derek brought to school a handmade flashlight. He explained that his dad made the flashlight for him. He told me that his dad knew a lot about electricity and he taught him about it. In September, Derek joined Cub Scouts. He was proud to come to school with his new uniform. He told me that his grandmother bought it for him. He also shared that during his grandmother's visit, he read her a book, *The Ghost* (Cowley, 1983), which was one of his first books from the ERI program.

At home throughout the school year, Derek regularly completed his classroom and ERI homework with his parents. He was also exposed to a range of other reading and writing experiences at home (e.g., writing a gift list during Christmas, reading books to his father, teaching his younger brother about first grade). Derek saw reading as being necessary in his father's work so that he could read manuals as he fixed copiers. He was proud to tell me that his mother knew a lot about school and reading; however, when I asked if he liked to read or write, he said no. It might be that within the context in which the question was asked, Derek translated *read* and *write* with *school work.* In his home and community, Derek was literate in a variety of ways considering his use of language and participation in different literacy practices and communities (e.g., being a nature expert, a Cub Scout, a mechanic, and a Lego expert). In the classroom, he was eager to share these literacies, particularly in science, which contributed to his individual learning as well as to the history of his classroom community.

Family Concerns and Involvement

In the beginning of the school year, Derek's mother described Derek to Mrs. Boyd as a smart child with good listening skills, but he did not want to apply his skills to books. She thought he was good in math and mechanics, and he could pick up on instruments when he was listening to music (i.e., he could differentiate between a violin and a viola). Responding to Mrs. Boyd's parent survey, Derek's mother pointed out her perception of Derek's major strengths:

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

On the other hand, writing and particularly reading were real concerns for Derek's parents, who regularly worked with him at home and followed Mrs. Boyd's homework calendar and the ERI's program homework activities (both were displayed on their refrigerator).

His family saw learning to read and write at the first-grade level as a diffi- cult challenge for Derek. In the beginning of the school year, one of Derek's parents' teaching goals for Mrs. Boyd was to "help him see himself as a reader/writer" (Parent Survey, August 1998). Aware of the new proficiency stan- dards and the fourth-grade reading guarantee, his mother worried throughout the school year about the possibility of Derek not passing the fourth-grade reading proficiency test.

Early in the school year, Derek's mother was concerned about his low scores in the district's early assessment and his referral to the school's ERI program. She had concerns about how helpful the program would really be for Derek. After being a high school teacher for many years, she worried about the possi- bility of Derek staying in remedial reading for a long time. She also worried that he would be missing activities he liked such as art and science. After talk- ing with Mrs. Boyd, she decided to sign the permission form for Derek to par- ticipate in the ERI program. Mrs. Boyd reinforced to Derek's mother that the program would be helpful and that although the students in the ERI program would miss part of meeting time (e.g., calendar and interactive writing), she tried to rotate their meeting time so that a student would not miss the same

thing all the time, and she tried to wait until all students were in the room before reading aloud and giving instructions for morning activities.

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

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

The reading proficiency testing and the possibility of Derek being retained in fourth grade was a critical concern to his mother throughout the school year, and it continued to worry her regardless of his growth and progress at the end of the year.

Audiotape, June 1999

> I'm very concerned, I'll be very honest here, I know that right now he's like, you know, kind of the average or the passing point or just at the passing point or whatever, you know, for his grade. Right on grade level or whatever, I mean. I'd love to see him above grade level…as a reader. (^^^) I'd like to see him just to, I don't know how to say, have a little more of a buffer zone, I guess. So when he gets to something that becomes difficult, or he gets to next year in second grade, you know, I'd like him to start up a little…ahead than where he started this year in first grade, I guess. (^^^)
>
> I guess the part that—this is just a personal thing. The part that really scares me about [Derek] is…that I'm not sure sometimes,…like the standardized testing kind of thing, it's not the kind of learner he is, so I don't have—I'll, I'll be surprised if they, in my opinion, ever give a true assessment of what [Derek] knows and what [Derek] can do because a lot of what [Derek] can do is very…um…is oral and is very spatial

and physical and those kinds of tests don't test those kinds of
things (^^^)....[Derek] is a very nervous child, he bites at his
clothes, at his fingernails, ahm, he worries about being good at
things and successful at things, I think, you know,
ahm…when it comes to a big moment, which is a test, it's a
big moment kind of thing. It's not the everyday things. He
doesn't worry about the everyday, all the time basis. (^^^) I
really worry about that [Derek taking a proficiency test]. That's
something that I worry more than anything with him is that
[Derek] is gonna get frustrated and simply go with the "I don't
know."

The Teacher's Interactions and Relationship with Derek

Mrs. Boyd's instructional goals and decisions in relation to Derek's literacy
learning varied over the school year. In the beginning of the school year, she
was concerned that if she pushed too hard, Derek would get bogged down and
turned off to reading and writing. Her basic goal was to move Derek along by
building his confidence as a reader and writer and, at the same time, teaching
him the skills that he needed (e.g., word knowledge). In the fall, Mrs. Boyd
worked hard at supporting and challenging Derek's writing:

> *Journal Writing, October 1998*
> The biggest thing with [Derek] is he is capable of letter-sound
> relationships when writing. He needs to be nudged along.

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

Mrs. Boyd's interactions with Derek were influenced and expanded by her
knowledge of his outside school activities and experiences, as well as his partici-
pation in school activities. Her knowledge and consequent understanding of
Derek's different identities as a student, child, brother, and Cub Scout provided
a broader understanding of him as a learner, which supported and influenced
her classroom interactions. For example, in November, when Mrs. Boyd and I
visited Derek's home, we were able to observe his skills in putting complicated
Lego structures together with the support of pictures in the manual. This home
visit provided Mrs. Boyd with a broader picture of Derek as a learner. She was
able to see Derek's abilities and skills at building structures, and she learned

about the range of his activities and interests outside school. Mrs. Boyd's knowledge of Derek's interests, abilities, and experiences supported the development of a close relationship with him. For example, Derek's mother commented on the importance of the home visit for him. She mentioned that she could see Derek's "self-esteem thermometer" going up as the visit went on, and he felt happy about being able to show his abilities.

Following our home visit to Derek's house, Mrs. Boyd commented that Derek was participating more in the classroom. Despite his playfulness in the classroom, he also took classroom work assignments seriously. In her reflections about the home visits, she wrote

> *E-mail Communication, December 1998*
> It [the home visit] does give one so much more insight into a child's background—what they are bringing with them to school, etc. I believe it gives each of the parents the feeling that the teacher is truly interested in their child and them. It gives one the sense that the teacher is a friend…

Over the school year, Derek made significant progress in his reading and writing abilities, as well as his sense of himself as a reader and writer. As previously described, in the middle of the school year, Derek and Mrs. Boyd set reading and writing goals for the rest of the year: to be able to read a chapter book and learn how to better sound out letters in order to be able to spell new words. In March, he graduated from the ERI program. Mrs. Boyd started to meet more often with Derek and other students at his reading level in small reading groups. Her instructional goal was to support Derek's reading progress so that he could keep using and developing his reading strategies to read harder books and meet the district's reading proficiency standard. At the end of the year, Mrs. Boyd was happy with Derek's development of his reading and writing abilities even though he was not able to reach the district's proficiency standard for writing. Mrs. Boyd had concerns about the district's criteria for determining writing proficiency at first-grade level. She had found that students like Derek, who took more risks in their writing but did not spell everything correctly or use lower- and upper-case letters appropriately, got a score lower than or equal to that of a child who wrote simple and repetitive sentences with correct punctuation, spelling, and use of capital letters. Nevertheless, Derek's writing growth was significant in relation to the beginning of the year. More importantly, he developed a better sense of himself as a writer and reader, and he made attempts at writing new words and more elaborate and longer stories.

DISCUSSION: LITERACY LEARNING AS A NEGOTIATED PROCESS

By tracing the literacy learning story of Derek, I examine the interdependence of multiple layers of context influencing and shaping what gets constituted as

literacy learning. As a tracer unit, Derek's learning story illuminates the nature of (a) literacy learning as a negotiated process across multiple layers of context, (b) teaching decisions addressing an individual child as negotiating multiple perspectives and expectations, and (c) a definition of literacy as constituted by the negotiation of contexts, perspectives, and expectations.

Derek's learning story involved situated, dynamic, and contradictory definitions of what did or did not count as learning and literacy. Literacy learning for Derek involved a negotiated process of identity construction as a student and literate person. In other words, it involved negotiating personal interests and goals as well as his family's and teacher's expectations and goals, which were situated and constituted within a particular school, district, and state. His parents' and teacher's concerns shaped Derek's identity as a learner. Becoming literate as defined by the district's reading and writing proficiency standards for fourth grade was a major concern for his parents, while supporting Derek's positive image of himself as a reader and writer and reaching the district's proficiency standards were major concerns of his teacher, Mrs. Boyd. At the same time, Derek built spaces at the classroom level (through his relationship with Mrs. Boyd, classmates, and me) to share and build on his outside school experiences and multiple literacies (e.g., his knowledge about science, nature, Cub Scouts). Derek's relationship with Mrs. Boyd—especially her understanding of Derek as a learner—opened up classroom spaces for curriculum co-construction at the individual and collective levels (including one-on-one and whole group interactions). For example, Mrs. Boyd's ability to use Derek's knowledge about penguins and volcanoes during classroom discussions created rich opportunities for Derek to see himself as a competent learner and an expert and to actively contribute to the curriculum being constructed in the classroom. Similarly, when Mrs. Boyd agreed to read a passage from Derek's Cub Scout book as part of shared reading time, she reinforced Derek's choice for extracurricular reading as important and interesting. At the collective level, Derek's new book was used to promote reading and to expand the students' knowledge about reading.

In essence, understanding literacy learning processes requires an understanding of the complex ways in which children construct and use literacies and learning environments in their everyday lives, as well as understanding the complex ways that teachers and children negotiate and make sense of their ongoing process of curriculum co-construction. Classroom literacy learning represents the negotiation and juxtaposition of different texts, and it marks the presence of intertextual links, not only across time and activity within the classroom, but also between classroom events and broader contexts (e.g., the teacher's and students' home and community experiences, the school's and district's history and expectations). It is a process of interpreting and reinterpreting the social world and the learner's place in it (Dyson, 1995). Derek negotiated multiple layers of contexts (and their texts) located within the interactional spaces (Heras, 1993) built at the classroom level and outside the classroom (e.g., his family and com-

munity, the school, and the district's proficiency expectations). His identity as a learner and as a reader and writer in the classroom, as well as his teacher's and parents' images of what constituted literacy learning, were situated and co-constructed by the interdependence among multiple contexts.

IMPLICATIONS

The nature of classroom life is dynamic, rich, and complex. By tracing Derek's experiences in the classroom and at home and school over one school year, this study shows that it is necessary to take an over-time look across contexts to understand what becomes constituted as one child's story of literacy learning. Similarly, his teacher's individualized instructional decisions were situated and embedded within multiple layers of context. Derek's literacy learning story displays and illuminates the negotiation and juxtaposition of different texts and contexts that take part in classroom learning. This study demonstrates that the nature of literacy learning is contextually-bound. It needs to be examined in light of the views, beliefs, expectations, educational philosophy, history, and political positions of the teacher, students, their families, school, district, and other social structures in the larger society. Thus, what becomes defined as literacy learning reflects multiple, complex, and situated definitions or perspectives of what counts as literacy and literacy learning and teaching. Literacy learning is an evolving sociocultural and political process shaped by the literacy practices and opportunities for learning and teaching available in the classroom as well as the history and influence of other contexts.

A re-examination of static images of classroom practice and the nature of classroom literacy learning are needed to better understand the nature of literacy learning processes. To understand the nature of classroom literacy learning, as well as to examine appropriate and effective instructional practices, it is important not only to take into account the nature of a particular curriculum and classroom context (i.e., the teacher, students, evolving classroom community, space, time, and materials available) but also the social, political, cultural, and historical contexts in which they are embedded. Despite the rich body of literature in the area of literacy education, controversy continues over what is literacy learning, how best to teach early reading and writing, and how to assess children's learning. More comprehensive insights on the nature and interplay of literacy learning and teaching processes, as well as an examination of the contexts in which they are embedded, can help teachers and other educators understand early literacy in the classroom and the process of curriculum enactment.

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