

Small Groups and Figured Worlds:
An Analysis of Identities and Literacy Practices in Small-Group Literacy Sessions

by

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ABSTRACT

Small-group literacy instruction is frequently used in schools in order to engage students in discussions around texts. Instructional settings vary and produce a range of results. They are complex social spaces in which students position one another and themselves as they enact different identities. These identities are associated with sets of literacy practices. This paper describes the results of a study examining the ways in which 3rd and 4th grade students and their teachers positioned themselves and one another in three different small-group literacy settings and the literacy practices that they used as they performed their identities. Using a multimodal discourse analysis (Kress, 2012) and D/discourse analysis (Gee, 2005, 2011), the form and function of language and gestures were used to look at the kinds of identities that the participants enacted and the literacy practices that the students engaged in the different settings. The results of the analysis suggested that the identities that the participants performed were related to the context in which interactions around texts took place. The identities themselves were connected to the use certain literacy practices. The literacy practices used by the participants were also related to the classroom context. The findings suggest that it is important for teachers to consider the figured worlds active in small-group settings, the identities performed within those worlds, and the literacy practices in which students engage.

DEDICATION

For Margaret, Gabriel, Delaunay, and Henri, whose patience and support have allowed me to follow paths that would not have otherwise been open.

And for Susan, who raised me to always seek what is right and just and to tell the kinds of stories that make things change.

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Growing up, education and the public school system were a major part of life. My mother, Susan, told my brother and me countless stories about her work as a special education teacher in a junior high school. Though many of these stories involved trials and frustrations, many also stood as testament to the value of perseverance, creativity, and a thirst for social justice. These stories were the foundation for my belief that hard work leads to positive outcomes, that thoughtful problem solving yields results, and that change is possible. I would like to thank Susan for these gifts.

My wife, Margaret, is never at rest. She is continually engaged in projects aimed at addressing social issues, both locally and nationally. She is a maker of objects and a parent. She rides horses at high speeds and teaches anyone that comes to her to learn. An inspiration to me, she constantly encourages and presses me to do new things and to work harder to achieve what we both believe to be right. I wish to thank her for her companionship and support.

Over the years, I have spent countless hours in classrooms, consumed considerable amounts of time finishing a Master's degree, and expended a great deal of energy in pursuit of a doctorate. My children, Gabriel, Delaunay, and Henri, have seen me through it all. They have been patient and supportive throughout these (sometimes very long) years. I will be forever grateful for their love and encouragement.

In 2010, Josephine Peyton Marsh, my advisor and guide, offered me a position as a literacy coach. This position, as well as the research opportunities that accompanied it, led me down the path that I follow now. I am deeply appreciative of the opportunities that she has given me. As a mentor in research and coaching, Josephine has taught me

invaluable lessons about working with people, teaching adults, and overcoming obstacles to improve the ways that schools work. I thank her for her encouragement, support, and counsel.

The participating teachers in my dissertation study were an inspiration to me. As instructors, they were constantly reflective, passionate about their work, and always willing to share what they learned through practice. They taught me quite a bit about being a teacher, a literacy coach, and a researcher. I am thankful that they invited me into their classrooms and that they were generous with their time and thoughts. Their work has shown me more than I could have imagined.

I left the classroom in 2010 in order to begin my doctoral studies. As a classroom teacher, I wanted to know more about reading comprehension and intended to conduct research on the cognitive processes that led to comprehension. Frank Serafini and Jim Gee exposed me to ideas about learning, schools, and literacy that greatly expanded the way that I think about the world. Not only have they provided me with enough fuel for a lifetime of research on literacy learning, they have given me the theoretical and practical foundations that I use in my work as a provider of professional development and teacher preparation. I am grateful for their guidance and support.

Finally, I would like to thank my brother, Russell, and my sister-in-law, Lisa for their support. Through humor, an openness to listen, and the right beverage at the right time, they helped me to get through this work. I would also like to thank Lettice Pelotte for all of her support and for helping me to work through the finer points of this paper. Additional, I'd like to thank the literacy professionals at my school, Patti and Jennifer, for cheering me on as I approached the finish line.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Teacher: Like my little boy who runs around the room in homeroom, he is always—he crawls under the desks. He's like a little animal of sorts. Like the class was like, "Stop acting like an animal."

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Teacher: And it's—

Interviewer: And then he does?

Teacher: And then he stops because it's social pressure.

Interviewer: Right.

Teacher: It's like one of the like positive ways social pressure works in schools, I think. But like I feel like they're at an age where like they don't—they're like just starting that peer pressure thing, and so they don't—I don't know. I think they can—they are still learning. Sitting funny, like I feel like as they get older, they will begin to sit more appropriately because like the whole like ideas of con—like conforming to society's like standards, like those will kick in more and silly things like sitting up rather than slouching over. Those will kind of self-correct.

During my 16 years as an elementary school teacher and literacy coach, I implemented a broad range of instructional programs and used a wide variety of instructional materials to provide literacy instruction. At the beginning of my career, for instance, I taught using phonics programs that included explicit directions for teaching

students letter sounds and spelling patterns. For six years, I taught reading using a popular basal series that outlined a progression of instructional activities for use in the classroom. I participated in professional development sessions and seminars to ensure that I knew how to use the programs with fidelity. Though the materials and programs given to me for use in the classroom were similar to those used in other classrooms, and although all of the teachers had received instruction in how to use the programs, academic outcomes in each classroom differed from year to year. In addition, students talked about the texts that they were reading in different ways, and they appeared to use different strategies to approach texts. There must have been, I reasoned, something different about the ways that the programs were implemented or the ways in which the materials were used in each of the classrooms. Later, after gaining a bit of distance from the classroom and from my role as an elementary school teacher, I became increasingly aware that the social environments that developed in classrooms had more to do with the outcomes of literacy instruction than I had previously thought.

For a year-and-a-half, after taking leave from the classroom to pursue a doctorate, I held a position as a literacy coach in a charter school. While working with students and teachers at the school, I became aware that I was positioning myself in specific ways in relation to teachers and administrators and that the teachers and administrators, in turn, were positioning me in specific ways (Marsh, Krauter, Lammers, 2014). I found that the positions I took up informed my practice as a literacy coach as well as the identities I performed within the school. Finding that I had been positioned as an administrator, for instance, I worked to reposition myself as a classroom teacher. I used language associated with an identity as a classroom teacher and made choices about my practice as a coach

that were intended to make me appear more like one of the teachers at the school. As I visited classrooms, I became increasingly aware of the positioning and identity enactments that occurred as teachers and students worked together during literacy instruction. Like the identities that I enacted as a literacy coach, the identities that students and teachers performed seemed to be related to the choices they made about the language they used and the ways that they interacted with and around texts.

As the dialogue leading into this chapter demonstrates, the teacher being interviewed had an awareness of the impact that positioning had on the behaviors that students displayed in the classroom. In the snippet, which is an excerpt from an interview conducted as a part of the study described below, the teacher reports that one of her students, “runs around the room” and that he had crawled under tables at the beginning of the school year. The teacher posits that the child’s behavior changed in response to the social environment in which he found himself. Her observation hints at the importance of looking at the ways in which people are positioned as they interact in schools, and opens the door to a new way of thinking about literacy instruction.

Purpose

A considerable amount of time, effort, and physical resources have been devoted to the design and implementation of instructional programs in an effort to teach students to read. In many schools, teachers meet with students in small groups in order to differentiate instruction and engage students in conversations about printed texts. Small-group instruction is a well-supported instructional practice and appears to improve students’ vocabulary, oral fluency, literal recall, overall comprehension, and student engagement (Anderson, Wilkinson, & Mason, 1991; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Fien, et al.,

2011; Smagorinsky and Fly, 1993). In a study of effective classroom practices, Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole (2000) determined that small-group instruction was among the practices most frequently used by effective teachers. During small-group instruction, students and teachers work together in order to discuss texts, ask and answer questions, and practice skills and strategies meant to improve reading fluency, word attack, and comprehension. Though the use of small-group literacy instruction has been shown to improve students' academic performance in reading, it has also been suggested that small-group settings vary considerably and that they produce a range of results (Chinn, Anderson, & Waggoner, 2001; Smagorinsky & Fly, 1993).

Some of this variation may be due to differences in the teaching environments in which instruction occurs. Elementary school classrooms are complex spaces in which teachers and students interact with one another as they work to interpret and make use of a broad range of texts (Leander & Rowe, 2006). As interactions occur, students and teachers are positioned as being certain kinds of participants within the context of the classroom and they position themselves as they enact specific identities. These positions and identities are associated with ways of using and interpreting language.

The purpose of this dissertation study is to look closely at how students and teachers take up and enact identities as they position themselves and as others position them in small-group settings centered on reading and talking about printed texts. The study also examines the literacy practices that students engage in as they take up and enact these identities.

Rationale

In small-group settings, students and teachers interact with a variety of texts and come into direct contact with other group participants. Since these settings are inherently social in nature, participants in small-group settings are exposed to acts of positioning, they display identities as they take up or resist positions, and they work to position themselves in relation to others. According to Moje, Luke, Davies, and Street (2009), identities are related to each individual's development and use of literacy practices. Issues related to positioning and identity enactment may shape small-group settings and the outcomes of small-group instruction. In order to improve literacy instruction, it is important to develop an understanding of how teachers and students enact identities in small-group settings and the literacy practices that students employ as they engage in small-group instruction.

Some research has been conducted in an effort to understand the ways that identities are enacted within the classroom as well as the relationships among identities, participation in sanctioned classroom activities, and academic performances (e.g. Maloch, 2005; Moller, 2004; Leander & Rowe, 2006). More research, however, is necessary in order to develop a better understanding of the relationships among positioning, the enactment of identities, and the performance of specific literacy practices. Though some studies suggest that identity and positioning have an impact on learning, additional research is needed in order to add to an understanding of the identities that students and teachers enact and the specific literacy practices that accompany them, particularly those literacy practices that are highly desirable in academic settings. This study will contribute to the literature on literacy instruction and the enactment of identities in schools by looking closely at the identities that students and

teachers take up and enact and the literacy practices that come into use as participants interact in the context of small-group settings.

Theoretical Perspective

Small-group settings allow students and teachers to interact closely as they work together to make sense of texts and as they interact with and produce a variety of instructional texts and materials. The interactions in which teachers and students engage are complex (Leader & Rowe, 2006). Participants in classroom activities position one another, they are positioned by the texts with which they interact, they enact identities in relation to the positions that they are offered, and they actively position themselves as they engage in interactions. The definition of identity developed for the purpose of this study takes into account both the positions into which people are cast and individuals' enactment of identities within the context of small-group settings.

Social positioning. Identities are constructed or produced in social settings in which relations of power work to both constrain and delimit what can be said and done in a particular setting. Agencies, institutions, and individuals in positions of power afford or offer identities to individuals and groups. As individuals take up or resist the positions that they are offered, their identities and future positions are shaped and reshaped as they move through social environments in which they are continually positioned or repositioned (Moje, Luke, Davies, & Street, 2009).

Differentiated in the literature from roles, positions are ephemeral and situational (McCarthy, 1998). While roles constitute longer-term commitments that cannot be contested, positions are more context dependent and can be disputed or resisted (Harre & Slocum, 2003). I can be positioned, for instance, as an authority while I am in the

classroom during the school day, but I am likely to be positioned in other ways at other times and in other settings. I may choose to resist being positioned as an authority, though this does not necessarily mean that the position will be rescinded or altered. The positions that are taken up in any given setting help to structure interpretations of that setting.

In any given context, positions are associated with certain meanings, obligations, privileges, and social practices. Harre and Slocum (2003) and Harre, et. al (2009) refer to these as duties and rights. Harre and Slocum (2003) define duties as the actions that individuals are obligated to perform. Rights are sets of expectations that people have regarding the duties of others. Both duties and rights, according to these authors, are fulfilled and interpreted according to an individual's readings or interpretations of the positions that they take on.

Harre et al. (2009) view social events, which would include small-group sessions, as confluences of intersecting story lines. Each story line or narrative thread develops as actors take positions within the context of the narrative. As positions in a narrative are assumed, story lines help individuals to construct their interpretations of their rights and duties within an event.

Harre and Slocum (2003) briefly illustrate this theoretical model by discussing the interpretation of rights and duties during the Vietnam War. The authors posit that one predominant story line held that the war was waged in defense of freedom while another story line argued that Vietnam was defending itself against more dominant world powers. People defined their duties in relation to the war according to the story line to which they were most closely connected. Some saw themselves as obligated to fight in the war while

others felt that they were committed to protesting the war. Narrative frames determined the positions that were available and subsequently the rights and duties that people assumed in relation to the story line. Because the story lines during the period in which the war was waged varied so violently, there was significant conflict among actors in social events surrounding the war, a condition that worked to shape newly emerging story lines. In essence, the story lines that individuals construct around a social event are important in organizing speech and action.

Participants in social events, according to Davies and Hunt (1994), use discourse to position themselves and others as being more or less powerful in a given situation. They may also construct contexts, using discourse, in which other individuals and groups are positioned as having varying degrees of power. The discourses available to individuals and groups, however, are limited. Discourses are learned as people develop linguistically (Davies, 1990). The cultural settings in which individuals develop allow them differential access to discourses. Having grown up in the Deep South, for instance, I did not have access to discourses associated with hockey, though I became familiar with discourses used in fundamentalist Christian churches.

As discourses are learned, people develop a sense of what it means to be a person of a certain sort. Over time, they become identified with the discursive practices to which they have access and the ways in which they use discourses in social settings. Additionally, people develop senses of themselves in relation to the ways that they can and cannot be positioned. Discourses and associations with specific sets of rights and duties can also work to define specific positions for individuals and groups. According to Davies (1990), discourses in particular provide a medium through which individuals can

be interpreted. People become identified with the discursive practices to which they have access and the ways in which they use discourses in social settings.

Davies posits that people develop personal histories as they are positioned in different contexts. They develop a composite sense of self. Butler (1997) agrees with this assumption, asserting that subjects are created in part through repetition. Social institutions and people in positions of power actively work to position individuals and groups, coercing them into positions or subjectivities. Butler asserts that, under repeated and pervasive structural pressure, positions become a part of a person's sense of self.

Positions, as well as the discursive tools and power relations with which they are associated, are not constructed or maintained at the individual level. One cannot invent or assume a position without drawing on social structures and discourses that are already available. The resources for the construction and dissemination of positions are, at least in part, available in social contexts through media and other cultural artifacts including songs, books and television programs (Holland & Leander, 2004). Artifacts like wedding photographs and narcocorridos, a genre of music that positions drug traffickers as heroic figures, help individuals to understand what it means to be a certain kind of person (Adrian, 2004, Edberg, 2004). While cultural artifacts help to reproduce and disseminate positions, they are at the same time produced through acts of positioning. Episodes of positioning, according to Holland and Leander (2004), leave physical traces. Articles in a newspaper, school records, or wedding photographs, for instance, remain even after the social events in which they were produced have ended. Evidence of positions can be read in artifacts and the positions may be reproduced. The use of specific cultural artifacts, as

well as the activation of discourses and uses of sign systems are also related to the ways in which identities are enacted in particular contexts.

Identities. The definition of identity developed for this study, and a starting place for developing a framework for examining positioning and identities in the context of the classroom, holds that an identity is one's sense of self over time and across contexts. Since individuals are inescapably connected to social worlds through interactions with other people and through the cultural artifacts that pervade the environments in which they live, identities are socially constituted and sustained. The social environments in which people interact are complex. As a result, the identities that develop in them are complex as well. They are fluid and changeable, influenced by actions and meanings associated with relations of power and episodes of positioning. At the same time, they are subject to individual agency and open to improvisation (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998).

I mentioned earlier that external positioning has an impact on an individual's ability to form and enact identities. Positions act as frameworks that define a range of possible actions in a social event. They impose identities on individuals by explicitly and implicitly limiting discourse and socially delimiting what is possible and impossible within a social event. They also prescribe obligations and define privileges. Wortham (2004) observed the effects of positioning on the development of identities in an ethnographic study of high school classrooms. In one classroom, a student was initially positioned as a "good student." She was permitted to inject humor into discussions and was allowed full participation in conversations. Later, positioned as a disruptive student, her use of discourse was explicitly limited and her ability to freely enact identities was

implicitly limited by her teacher's actions. Through repetition, identities developed in relation to social positions may become a part of a person's identity, their sense of self. In the case of Wortham's participant, the student increasingly took on aspects of an outcast identity. By affording positions to people, groups and individuals in power impose identities.

According to Gee (2012), it is generally understood that some identities are preferable to others within certain social situations. Identities can be used in order to accomplish tasks or to take advantage of privileged positions. People must work, through the use of discourse, cultural artifacts, and other socially recognized tools, to become recognized within a setting as performing a specific socially situated identity. In order to "pull off" (p. 155) an identity, a person must use the proper linguistic tools, perform the correct actions, and use the right cultural artifacts in ways that are socially recognized as being in alignment with specific identities.

Gee (2005) refers to the resources or tool sets that are used to construct identities as Big "D" Discourses. The author differentiates between discourses, spelled with a lower case "d" and referring to instances of language use, and Discourses, which are comprised of language and "other stuff" (p.7). Though language is a part of any Discourse, language is accompanied by ways of acting, thinking, interacting, dressing, and feeling (Gee, 2006; 2011). In order to be recognized as performing a specific identity, an individual needs to activate or use Discourses properly or in alignment with the identity.

While individuals may use Discourses to enact specific identities, they may also enact identities to resist positions, choosing to speak and act in ways that are inconsistent with culturally imagined positions. A young woman might choose, for instance, to dress

in unfashionable clothes in order to resist positions offered to her by the television media. Resistance can also take less confrontational forms. A person may assume positions in order to shed identities or resist positions that are less desirable. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) provide an example that aptly illustrates this type of resistance. In an ethnographic study of Alcoholic's Anonymous meetings, the authors found that the participants, by using narratives and token artifacts, took identities as alcoholic non-drinkers in order to replace identities as alcoholic drinkers. Though it does not necessarily mean that the afforded positions will be rescinded or altered, resistance may have an impact on the ways in which individuals choose to act and how positions influence them over time.

Holland and Leander (2004) argue that identities accrete over time. Traces of episodes of positioning and the embodied characteristics of identities build to form an individual's subjectivities or composite sense of self. The authors compare this process to the construction of the rim of a drum or the plying of a rope, processes in which different materials are layered and twisted around one another to form a new whole. In one setting, a person may take on an identity as a father by accepting aspects of the identity associated with the position. Through repetition, an identity will leave traces both in the physical setting in which the identity is enacted and on the person performing it. Artifacts left by episodes of positioning, like a sippy cup under the seat of the car or a particular way of responding to other people, serve as reminders of the position. These reminders reinforce the identity. The same person may also take up a position as a teacher, taking on elements of the identity in the same ways. These identities can "thicken" (p. 32) over time resulting in a lived identity that is multifaceted and complex.

Moje, Luke, Davies, and Street (2009) stress that the “laminations” described by Holland and Leander (2004) carry with them personal histories and past experiences of being positioned. Drawing out the metaphor, the authors assert that layers of identities can be removed and reapplied, scratched, or gouged as individuals continue to have experiences in the social world. They argue, however, that the metaphor may be insufficient in that it emphasizes a linearity that may not exist. It is not necessarily the case that identities will continue to build over time. Working to account for sudden shifts in identity as well as the apparent semi-stability of identities over time, they posit that identities might be seen more like a “cube or quilt” (p. 431), multifaceted rather than single sided and cumulative. On one side of a cube, a professor may accrete features of an identity related to academic life, while on another side she may develop identities as a mother.

Marsh, Krauter, and Lammers (2014) developed a model that accounts for both the “laminated” qualities of identities as well as shifts in identities as individuals move among social settings. Used to illustrate the identity as position metaphor as it is applied in a study of experiences related to becoming literacy coaches in a charter school, the metaphor is represented as occurring in four dimensions. Identities abut one another, allowing for movement among identities in the social world. Histories of positioning accrete over time as aspects of specific identities come in and out of use. At the same time, some identities overlay or are laminated onto multiple facets of a person’s self as they experience positioning in different settings. In their study, the authors described identities as university researchers overlaid concurrently with performed identities as

(among others) observers, literacy coaches, and administrators. A graphic representation of the model is included here.

Figure 1. The Tesseract Identity Model

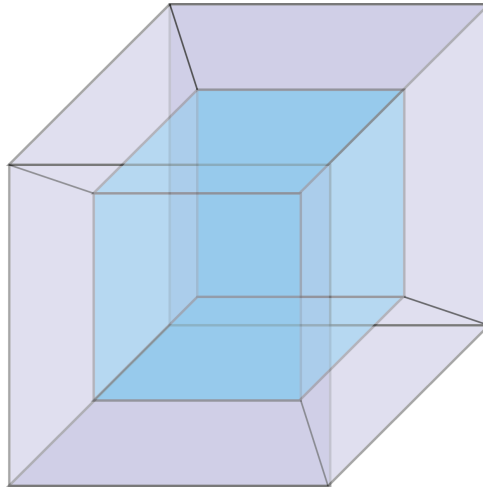


Figure 1. The Tesseract Identity Model. Adapted from “Evolving collaborations: Literacy coaching as a formative process” by J. P. Marsh, D. R. Krauter and J. Lammers, 2014. Manuscript in preparation.

Visualized as a hypercube or tesseract, this model represents identities as sides or facets on a cube constructed of multiple layers. The facets shift over time, rearranging the order or prominence of the layers.

The different layers of a person’s identity can come into play depending on the situations in which they find themselves. At home, a person’s identity as a father may be displayed more prominently. At work, the same person may display identities more closely related to their career choices, though aspects of the fatherly identity may remain apparent. In addition, people are positioned differently in each setting in which they move. A person might be considered an authority in one setting and a novice in another. Sometimes, these identities and positions conflict or come into tension with one another.

As Marsh, Krauter and Lammers worked as literacy coaches, for instance, they found themselves positioned in such a way that they were more closely aligned with the school administration than with the teaching staff. Though one of the authors needed to take up elements of an administrative identity in order to work with teachers, it conflicted with his identity as a teacher, as one of the group.

It is important to note here that the contexts in which positioning and identity enactments take place have a great deal to do with what can and cannot be said and done and how cultural artifacts and the specifics of identity enactments are read by actors within the context. Actors are recognized and positioned in figured worlds that give significance to the actions and artifacts with which they are associated (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998)

Figured worlds. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain ascribe four major characteristics to figured worlds. First, figured worlds develop around generalizations from past experiences and participants' actions and experiences as the worlds are lived. Participants' prior experiences feed the construction of the spaces as people interact in relation to them. They are constructed over time during everyday social practice as people have experiences and take action in social settings. Gee (2011) concurs, adding that figured worlds are stories or pictures of what can be considered typical or normal in a given context. Cultural and social interactions are a part of a person's experience, and contribute to the development of figured worlds. People define the rules, positions, and normative conventions of the spaces as they participate in them.

Second, figured worlds are organized around positions. Since they are socially imagined and constructed, figured worlds do not exist in certain times and places.

Instead, they develop as positions related to the worlds are taken up. Entrance into figured worlds, according to Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain (1998), is contingent on the positions that one is able to successfully claim. One might never be admitted to certain figured worlds due to his or her ability to access certain positions. In some cases, one might never come across a specific figured world as they move through life while other worlds might be only partially experienced.

Third, Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain stress that figured worlds exist only in the context of interpersonal interactions. Figured worlds do not exist solely in the mind of the individual. At the same time, they are not constant or tangible physical spaces, imagined and shared as a “whole image” (p. 41). They exist only in the interactional space that creates and reproduces them. Gee (2011) adds that figured worlds are fluid and changeable. As societies change, the stories and pictures of what people see as normal or typical change as well.

Lastly, figured worlds differentiate and distribute people as they give meaning to identities and positions by relating them historically and culturally. This distribution happens, according to Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain (1998), in part because people’s senses of self are spread across many figured worlds and in part because figured worlds relate people to specific socially determined identities, figuring them in a ways that are socially identifiable.

Constructing and invoking figured worlds. Figured worlds, like positions and identities, become embodied in cultural artifacts (Gee, 2011). During the process of collective meaning making, objects are inscribed with meaning and significance. In a space like a classroom, objects including blackboards, textbooks, and reading

assessments carry meanings associated with the figured worlds in which they come into use (Bartlett & Holland, 2002). Artifacts produced in figured worlds, according to Bartlett and Holland (2002), do not necessarily have to be inanimate or entirely physical objects. People and qualities may also be given meaning as significant symbols within these social spaces. A person might represent beauty or intelligence, for instance. It is these artifacts that evoke components of figured worlds including storylines, narratives, generic structures, and discourses.

In figured worlds, stories and generic structures are ways of organizing knowledge. In a sense, narratives themselves are cultural artifacts, produced through a process of communal consent and made a part of living figured worlds. In one study described by Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998), participants in Alcoholics Anonymous meetings authored and shared their own stories. The stories were given meaning in the context of meetings. Over time, they became prominent in constructing not only the meetings themselves, but also the organization as a whole. The stories helped to organize interactions and meanings and providing them specific relational characteristics.

Holland Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) assert that there is a certain level of abstraction inherent in the constitution of figured worlds. Recurring activities and regular events become distilled over time in the minds of participants, becoming expectations about the ways that things should be. These events and activities, when related in some way that is collectively seen as meaningful within a context, take on forms similar to the storylines described by Harre et al. (2009). A child that openly resists going to bed, for instance, might be viewed by middle class parents as asserting independence while the

child might be seen as obstinate by working class parents. Middle and working class parents maintain different stories concerning typical childhood behavior (Gee 2011). More than ascribing rights and duties to individuals through positioning within a storyline, however, figured worlds provide a backdrop against which actors, artifacts, events, and interactions are interpreted (Holland Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain, 1998). The narrative gives meaning to future events as well as the positions that people take within social activities.

One important aspect of this conceptualization of social events is that it is useful in examining issues associated with individual agency. Figured worlds are constantly constructed, changed, and dismantled as people participate in them. Though they serve as interpretive structures, organizing information and meanings, they are constructed as individual actors make choices, interact, and improvise within the bounds of the positions that they have taken up. McClaren (1999) notices, for instance, that by standing in a specific spot in the classroom in which he was observing, he assumed the power reserved for the instructor who normally stood there. Though McLaren attributes the power shift to an adherence to the rituals common to the classroom, it might also be argued that the classroom was, in fact, in the midst of a figured world that gave significance to the space at the front of the classroom. By acting in certain ways within figured worlds, people have the ability to position themselves in relation to others in an event and have opportunities to make changes in relations of power.

Connection to the Study

I mention earlier that identity and positioning are complex concepts. The definition developed here is based on literature that defines both identities and positions

as being both socially constructed and constitutive of social settings. In sum, identities are a person's multiple and fluid senses of self. People use identities to organize environmental input and to style or design their own social output. They are developed in relation to positions that are afforded to them by other people in social contexts and by social institutions. Individuals take up and resist positions within figured worlds, collectively imagined social spaces that define identities and positions and are defined by them. In educational contexts, identities matter. They are important not only because they help people to read and interpret social settings and interactions, they direct the flow of access to, and the use of, different Discourses. Discourses, themselves, are associated with specific literacy practices.

As students and teachers move through social settings, they are positioned in a variety of ways and they position themselves as they enact identities as certain kinds of people. They come to understand what it means to be a certain kind of teacher, learner, and student, all of which constitute identities that can become embodied over time and develop a level of stability. Using this understanding of positions, identities, and literacy practices, my study looks closely at the ways in which each of these social constructs are manifested as students and teachers interact in small groups, settings in which participants work in close proximity during discussions to learn and engage in literacy practices.

Literacy practices. Since the participants' engagement in literacy practices is central to the current study, it is important to understand what is meant by the term *literacy practice* as it relates to the results of the analysis.

More than simply reading and writing, literacy practices are the ways in which people use written texts as they interact with the world around them. As Barton and Hamilton (2005, p. 7) concisely define them, “literacy practices are what people do with literacy.” They include a range of text-based practices including posting evaluative comments in online forums (de Pourbaix, 2005); creating profiles for social networking sites (Mills, 2010); identifying, labeling, and recording cattle for sale at an auction (Jones, 2005); and interpreting and creating graffiti (Stockdill & Moje, 2013).

In school settings, which constitute domains of life that can differ in some ways from home, work, or community settings (Barton & Hamilton, 2005), students are exposed to literacy practices that involve comprehending and using texts in specific ways in order to communicate with others. Students learn to use speech, action, signs, symbols, and print to make and interpret texts that can be used in the context of academic life (Leander & Rowe, 2006). School-based literacy practices might include creating a project representing content that has been learned in a classroom (Ormerod & Ivanic, 2005) or answering comprehension questions on reading assessments (Hall, et. al, 2010).

Literacy practices are social constructs. They evolve over time, residing with and among groups of people. For this reason, they are not directly observable. Instead, they can be recognized or discerned during and through literacy events, interactions and activities that involve literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 2005). Events include things like literature circles, literature discussions, small-group instruction, or filling out worksheets. Researchers can look for patterns in literacy events that indicate engagement in literacy practices of different sorts (Street & Leung, 2010). Through this lens, literacy practices are described and related to identities, positions, and figured worlds in the sections below.

Research Questions

In short, this study examined the ways in which teachers and students enacted identities as they positioned themselves and as they positioned one another in the context of three different small-group settings, specifically during a literature circle discussion, a literature discussion, and a small-group instructional session. In addition, the study explored students' engagement in literacy practices as they enacted identities. This research asks: What happens as students and teachers interact in small-group settings centered on printed texts? Specifically, this study focuses on the following:

- How do students and teachers position one another and how do they position themselves as they enact identities in the context of small-group literacy settings?
- What kinds of literacy practices are used as students and teachers enact identities in small-group settings?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Research on literacy instruction, as evidenced by the scope and breadth of the field, has shown literacy to be a complex and somewhat fluid topic. Studies have been conducted in an effort to define processes related to literacy learning, on the efficacy of specific instructional strategies, and on the importance of learning environments in providing effective literacy instruction. There is still a need, however, for additional research on student and teacher identities and literacy practices. Research should be conducted in order to understand the complexities of literacy learning and to design and implement the best possible literacy instruction. Since the current study is primarily concerned with the identities that students and teachers perform as they engage with one another during instruction, I focus in this section on the literature related to social learning environments in which these identities are constructed and enacted. I also focus on classroom discussion and small-group instruction. The current study adds to this literature by closely examining the identities and positions that students and teachers offer and take up as they use a range of literacy practices in the context of small-group settings.

Social Learning Environments in the Classroom

Though there is significant disagreement about the emphasis that should be put on code-based instruction (e.g. phonics and alphabetic principals), there is general agreement that meaning-based instruction should be included as a part of literacy instruction. (Anderson, Wilkinson, & Mason, 1991; Duke & Pearson, 2002; NICHD, 2000; Smith, 1992). Duke, Pearson, Strachan, and Billman (2011) assert, in fact, that

students learn to read primarily in order to comprehend texts. They do so in order to participate in social exchanges in which information and ideas are shared. Teachers are often critical in creating learning environments and facilitating activities in which students learn and apply a range of literacy practices aimed at making meaning with and from texts (Connor, et al., 2009; Nystrand, 2006; Palincsar, Brown, & Martin, 1987). Teachers help to shape how students are viewed as learners, how students interact with and around texts in classrooms, and the ways in which materials are used during instruction.

Teachers, students, and instructional materials: Shaping learning environments. The literature on literacy instruction has identified a variety of environmental and social factors that appear to have an impact on student outcomes. These studies suggest that teachers are complicit in shaping environments conducive to literacy learning. In some cases, teachers' perceptions influence student performance. Student motivation and engagement, factors that are often influenced by classroom environments and teacher talk, can also affect student outcomes. Additionally, classroom organization and the application of instructional materials can affect students' participation in classroom activities. In sum, the following studies begin to explore relationships between students' and teachers' attitudes and interactions and academic outcomes. They also demonstrate a need for additional study into relationships among classroom environments, components of social interactions, and the application of literacy practices.

Though there is some disagreement concerning the impact of teacher expectations on student outcomes, studies have found relationships between how teachers perceive

students' academic abilities and students' performance in the classroom (Jussim & Harber, 2005). Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), for instance, in a seminal study aimed at exploring connections between student growth and teachers' expectations, found that students designated by the researchers as being capable of accelerated growth outperformed students in a control group that had not been marked as such. The authors determined that teachers' expectations of students' abilities served as self-fulfilling prophecies. The effects of designating students as being capable learners were particularly significant in the lower grade levels.

Hinnant, O'Brien, and Ghazarian (2009) found that the relationship between expectations and performance were significant for only one subgroup of students participating in a longitudinal study conducted over a period of about ten years. Closely examining survey and assessments data in an effort to determine the effects of teacher expectations on performance across grade levels, the authors found that minority boys tended to underperform when expectations were low and over-perform when expectations were high. Though they describe a limited connection between teachers' perceptions of students' abilities and their performance in the classroom, they describe a significant relationship between perceptions of social ability, gender, and ethnicity and academic progress as students travel from grade to grade. When students are thought to be capable learners, these studies suggest, they may experience improvements in academic performance.

Students' motivation and engagement, like teachers' expectations regarding student performance, are related to academic growth. Motivation has been defined as students' responses to classroom stimuli and their willingness to engage cognitively with

reading tasks and concepts (Guthrie, Wigfield, & You, 2012). Engagement is described as students' intents and actions (Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013). Motivation and engagement have an impact on reading comprehension (Schiefele, Schaffner, Möller, & Wigfield, 2012). Teachers play a part in shaping classroom contexts in ways that improve motivation and engagement. By providing opportunities for choice, by exposing students to high-interest texts, or by providing meaningful feedback, for instance, teachers can improve student engagement and help them to make gains in literacy learning (Guthrie, Wigfield, & You, 2012).

Examining the efficacy of the Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction program (CORI), Guthrie et al. (1996) found that students demonstrated higher rates of motivation in the classroom when they were given time to observe real-world phenomena and to explore topics of choice. Providing students with opportunities to synthesize and evaluate information also improved motivation. Over the course of the study participants experienced improvements in engagement and increased their use of higher order reading strategies. Guthrie, Klauda, and Ho (2013) drew connections between instruction, motivation, engagement, and academic outcomes. As in previous studies, the authors found that motivation could be indirectly linked to academic growth through engagement. In some cases, however, motivation was found to directly influence growth in reading. The authors note that student interest and choice played a part in stimulating motivation, engagement, and, consequently, the use of higher-order thinking skills. By providing students with opportunities to interact around interesting texts, teachers in the study created conditions conducive to the development of motivation and engagement and, at the same time, encouraged the use of higher-order thinking skills while reading.

Classroom environments shape, and are shaped by, teachers' and students' perceptions and attitudes. Studies have found that the instructional materials that teachers provide and use also affect student growth. Hoffman, Sailors, Duffy and Beretvas (2004), for instance, found relationships between the quality and quantity of texts present in classrooms and scores on assessments of reading comprehension. Recommending that classrooms provide students with access to trade books and leveled texts, the authors posit that classroom environments may influence the ways in which people view and use literacy practices and recommend further study in this area.

In a two-year study comparing methods for delivering literacy instruction, McKeown, Beck, and Blake (2009) found that instructional materials, which are elements of a classroom environment, have an impact on the kinds of conversations that students and teachers have as they interact with texts. Comparing a scripted program of basal-based comprehension instruction with content and strategy-based instruction, the authors found that students' discussions were constrained by the kinds of questions that were scripted and asked while reading. Discussions during basal-based instruction, as a result, were less varied than discussions held in the other instructional settings and tended to cover less conceptual ground.

Romero-Little, et. al (2007) found that instructional materials, particularly those that script teacher and student interactions, can influence the kinds of language that students use as they talk about reading. The authors attribute native language loss in Native American communities in part to reading programs used in reaction to No Child Left behind policies, which encourage the use of heavily scripted reading programs. The

authors argue that these types of programs have an impact on the value that students and teachers place on certain types of language use.

The studies described above highlight the importance of considering student and teacher characteristics and social learning environments during literacy instruction. Though they do not specifically address issues related to positioning and identity enactment in relation to the use of literacy practices, they suggest that perceptions, motivations, levels of engagement, and instructional delivery impact student performance. These studies also suggest that specific types of instruction and instructional activities influence literacy learning. Figured worlds, which are influenced by individual's experiences, are related to identities and literacy practices. By closely examining the learning environments in which students and teachers interact, my study contributes to an understanding of the ways in which classroom contexts are related to identities, acts of positioning, and the application of specific literacy practices. These literacy practices include vocabulary and comprehension instruction. The studies reviewed below show the role that social learning environments have on these literacy practices.

Effective Teaching Practices: Vocabulary

Baumann (2009) argues that vocabulary knowledge is highly correlated with the ability to comprehend texts. The summary report authored by the NRP (NICHD, 2000) agrees, concluding that word knowledge allows students to comprehend the texts that they read. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the breadth of research on effective methods for teaching vocabulary, it is worth highlighting several studies that focus on the development of vocabulary knowledge in social settings. These studies

relate to my research in that they describe social learning environments related to positive student learning outcomes.

In a study exploring the efficacy of using teacher read-alouds and discussions to teach vocabulary, Beck and McKeown (2007) identify three characteristics of effective vocabulary instruction. These include the thorough explanation of word meanings, provision of multiple examples of word usage, and requirements that students explain appropriate and inappropriate usages of words. Effective instruction requires that teachers and students interact using language in order to make gains in vocabulary acquisition.

Building on this research, Fien, et al. (2011) studied the effects of using teacher read-alouds in conjunction with intensive small group instruction to help students develop and maintain vocabulary knowledge. The treatment group in this study participated in several discussion sessions focusing on the meanings of key words in the texts that they were reading. The study found that the discussion sessions had a significant effect on vocabulary acquisition over the long-term. Small group discussions appeared to enhance the impact of whole group vocabulary instruction. Similarly, Vaughn, et al. (2009) found that by increasing the amount of practice that students had with words, providing students with opportunities to discuss meanings and concepts, and using discussions to scaffold vocabulary concepts, vocabulary acquisition could be improved significantly. In each of these studies, students participated in social exchanges in order to make academic progress. Discussion figured prominently in interventions and instructional designs.

Effective Teaching Practices: Comprehension Instruction

Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, and Rodriguez (2002) explored relationships between teaching practices and reading comprehension. They note that the most effective of the participating teachers taught students to use comprehension strategies by asking high-level questions rather than by asking low-level questions or lecturing. These teachers engaged their students in active reading and writing activities instead of providing information or asking students to participate in periods of round-robin reading. The more effective teachers balanced word-level and comprehension instruction and taught multiple strategies within the context of each lesson. Summarizing their findings, the authors argue that teaching practices, in addition to the quality of instructional content, are related to the efficacy of instruction. Active engagement, social interactions, and discussion are critical in reaching the highest levels of academic performance.

Examining the efficacy of narrative strategy instruction (NSI), Paris and Paris (2007) determined that students benefit from teacher explanation, modeling, regular guided practice, discussion, and collaboration. After engaging in instruction that included the gradual release of responsibility from teacher to student and opportunities to engage with interesting texts, first graders performed better on comprehension assessments than students in a control group. They retold narratives with higher rates of accuracy and scored higher on assessments of literal recall and inferential thinking. The authors stress that, though first graders often lack sufficient decoding skills to access the words in more complex texts, students can be provided with sufficient scaffolding to understand narratives. In order to make progress, however, students need to interact with teachers and with one another around texts of varying difficulties, including picture books.

Duke, Pearson, Strachan, and Billman (2011), in a chapter devoted to describing effective teaching practices, list ten components of effective reading comprehension instruction. Among the recommendations are several that involve or require the development of social learning environments. These include the provision of motivating and engaging classroom environments, scaffolded strategy instruction, differentiated instruction, and discussion. In addition, effective teachers model literacy practices and thinking, shaping for students what it means to be a reader and how they might think about the process of reading. They also tailor instruction to the individual needs of students, understanding that students interact with texts in different ways at different times. Recognizing that comprehension is a social practice, Duke, Pearson, Strachan, and Billman, assert that discussion is among the components used by many effective teachers. The authors state, however, that not all discussions are equally effective in helping students learn to independently comprehend texts.

McKeown, Beck, and Blake (2009) found that instruction based on discussions of the content of texts was more effective than whole-group comprehension strategy instruction. The authors attribute the findings to the nature of the discussions that occurred in each of the treatment groups. Students discussing the content of texts spent more time talking about the texts that they were reading than students being taught to apply comprehension strategies. These findings are interesting in that they highlight concerns about the proportion of time spent engaging in specific instructional activities. It is also notable that the study, though it was designed to examine differences among instructional strategies, found that the content and quality of student discussions had an impact on reading comprehension.

Each of the studies described above suggests that students learn to comprehend texts best as they interact with teachers and with one another. This emphasis on social interactions in learning environments suggests a need for research examining how students and teachers position one another as they enact identities in the context of small-group instruction. Since identities are related to the ways in which people use language, as well as other signs and signals, they play a role in how students and teachers interact in the context of instructional settings.

In addition to highlighting interaction, the authors discussed above identify discussion as an important component of literacy instruction. Given the emphasis that the studies place on discussion, and given that discussion has been recognized as a practice used by the majority of effective teachers (Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, & Rodriguez, 2002), the next section will address research relevant to the topic.

Effective Teaching Practices: Discussion

As an instructional tool, discussion is critical in helping students learn to comprehend the texts that they read. It is an effective tool for teaching comprehension strategies, improving student motivation, and helping students to acquire vocabulary. Discussion has also been related to the effective design and implementation of differentiated instruction. Nystrand (2006) supports these assumptions, stating in a review of the literature on classroom discourse that discussion enhances comprehension instruction at many levels.

Discussion is viewed, in some of the literature, as a method for helping students to use self-explanation to develop cognitive skills, improve comprehension, or to correct misconceptions. Chi, De Leeuw, Chiu, and LaVancher (1994) provide evidence of the

efficacy of self-explanation as a comprehension strategy. In a study designed to examine the effects of self-explanation on students' understanding of the circulatory system, the authors found that participants that generated higher numbers of self-explanations learned to correctly model the human circulatory system. Students providing lower numbers of self-explanations were not as successful.

Another benefit of engaging in conversations is related to the amount and types of language used during discussions. Chinn, Anderson, and Waggoner (2001), in examining an instructional frame that the authors term Collaborative Reasoning (CR), explored the ways in which teachers and students engaged in small-group discussion. CR was designed as a method for encouraging critical thinking and reading. In small, teacher-led groups, students are encouraged to forward arguments and counterarguments around common readings. Students work to build consensus during discussions centered on questions posed by their teachers. The authors found that teachers in CR groups asked high proportions of open-ended questions, took fewer conversational turns, and allowed students more control of topics. Instruction using CR was found to be more engaging. It also increased the amount of language used by students during instruction, increased the number of comprehension and cognitive strategies that students used during instruction, and improved students' use of academic discourse. In a study examining the impact of CR on student performance, Reznitskaya, et al., (2009) found that students participating in instruction using CR used stronger reasoning and argumentation skills both in small-group settings and in their written work.

According to Murphy, et al. (2009), discussions of several different types promote high-level comprehension as students read both academic and recreationally-oriented

texts. In a meta-analysis of studies exploring the use of discussion in teaching reading comprehension, the authors differentiated among programs used to structure discussions. CR was determined to be particularly effective in fostering critical thinking and reasoning while programs like *Junior Great Books Shared Inquiry* (The Great Books Foundation, 1999) and *Questioning the Author* (Beck & McKeown, 2006), which are intended to help students to retrieve information from texts, improved students performance on comprehension assessments. Discussion programs which approach texts from an aesthetic perspective improved students overall reading comprehension. The format of each program, as well as the contexts in which each program was implemented, appeared to have an impact on the types of gains that students experienced.

Eeds and Wells (1989) view discussion as an effective tool for encouraging social interactions in order to help students learn the use of effective comprehension skills. In a study of fifth and sixth-grade discussion groups, the authors found that students worked together to construct meaning by sharing connections among their lives and the texts that they were reading and by encouraging one another to use comprehension skills including prediction, interpretation, and verification. Palincsar, Brown, and Martin (1987), found similar results in a study on the effects of peer tutoring. It was found that reading comprehension improved for both tutors and tutees as they discussed literature. The authors attribute this growth to the social activation of thought processes. Socially supportive learning contexts helped students to develop comprehension strategies and to apply them during independent assessments. Maloch (2002) adds that participation in dialogue enables students to “gain, process, and organize knowledge” (p. 97).

In addition to stimulating the development of cognitive functions at individual and group levels, Nystrand (2006) notes that discussion has an epistemological function. Students and teachers use classroom discussions to help determine what counts as knowledge and understanding in the context of the classroom. Teachers ask and answer questions and structure classroom activities in ways that privilege or give credence to certain ways of thinking and specific bodies of knowledge. In approving a student's answer with a curt nod rather than a more active response, the authors assert, teachers move discourse in specific directions.

Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, and Gamoran (2003), in a study of discussions among teachers and diverse middle and high schools students, found correlations between patterns of classroom discourse and student outcomes. The authors categorized discussions as either monologic or dialogic. Monologic discussions were composed of a combination of lecture and seatwork (Nystrand, 2006). They emphasized recall and the identification of predetermined conclusions about texts. In dialogic discussion, meanings were exchanged and shaped through interactions among teachers and students. Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, and Gamoran (2003) found that there were significant differences between discussions in high and low-track classrooms. In high-level classrooms, the academic content was more challenging and there was a stronger emphasis on dialogic discussion. In low-track classrooms, teachers placed emphasis on monologic discussions. Instruction in high-track classrooms yielded better academic results. The authors conclude that the structure of discussions in each of the classrooms gave teachers and students specific roles and offered assumptions about what it meant to teach and what it meant to read. In dialogic discussions, exploration and meaning making were stressed.

Classrooms are complex social spaces. As students and teachers engage in conversations, they do more than simply discuss instructional strategies. Discussions have been shown to shape social contexts as well. Lin (1994), for instance, found that discussions in classrooms were used to relate individuals to one another within the context of the classroom. In one exchange captured by the author, an instructor made conversational moves in which she introduced the concept of gender differences and then positioned herself in relation to the gender issues themselves. The teacher used historical information in conjunction with local interactions to create specific meanings for activities in the classroom.

The roles and responsibilities that teachers and students take on during discussions are often implicitly rather than explicitly defined. Morrocco and Hinden (2002), in an analysis of conversational patterns in a middle school classroom, found that teachers set and worked within parameters that were followed by both teachers and students. Some of these parameters, which were defined and reinforced through negotiation and practice, helped to reinforce the use of particular instructional strategies. Others worked to construct the social context of the classroom.

In sum, the literature on discussion tends to fall into four general categories. First, discussion is seen as a method for helping students to cognitively structure knowledge and correct misconceptions about specific topics. Second, studies suggest that discussion can be effectively used to share and practice comprehension strategies as well as to facilitate collective reasoning. Third, some discussion formats and programs stimulate collaborative thinking and engage classroom participants in dialogic exchanges in which meanings are created in transactions with texts (Kucan & Beck, 1997). Finally, it has

been suggested that the discourse used in discussions about literature helps to constitute or reify epistemological stances within classrooms. Discussions shape what it means to know and the nature of what is considered knowledge (Nystrand, 2006).

Discussion is a critical component of literacy instruction. Since identities are linked to the kinds of language that people use and the ways in which individuals participate in social events, my study aims to examine the kinds of identities that students and teachers enact as they participate in discussions. Many discussions of the types described above are conducted in the context of small-group settings, settings in which students and teachers work closely together in order to make sense of texts. In the next section, these small-group instructional settings are explored in more detail. I review literature that describes the social learning environments that can develop in these settings.

Effective Teaching Practices: Small-group Instruction

Literacy instruction is frequently delivered in small-group settings in elementary school classrooms. These settings provide forums in which teachers can provide differentiated instruction rather than the one-size-fits-all instruction often provided in whole-group settings (Swanson, 2008). In addition, small-group settings allow students opportunities to engage in discussions of the types recommended in the literature on reading instruction. Students are able to take more turns talking during discussions in small groups and are given the ability to help determine the focus and direction that discussions take. Small group settings constitute social environments in which students and teachers interact while engaging in the kinds of instructional practices and activities that have been shown to improve reading comprehension. Research exploring

differentiated instruction and small-group discussion is described below. I focus particular attention on the ways in which these studies address the development and maintenance of social learning environments.

Differentiation. Differentiated instruction, in contrast to instruction based on one-size-fits all models, is characterized by a level of instructional tailoring for individual students. In any given classroom, students have a broad range of strengths and needs. When instruction is delivered at the whole-group level, some students in a class may receive instruction on topics, skills, and strategies that they have already mastered while others may not be ready for the instruction. By differentiating or individualizing instruction, teachers provide students with lessons that more closely fit their academic needs. In order to facilitate instruction, students are continually assessed in order to identify foci for literacy instruction and to match instruction to the needs of the students.

Reis, et al. (2011), in a study examining the efficacy of the School Wide Enrichment Model-Reading (SEM-R), found that differentiated instruction was a highly effective method for improving both oral reading fluency and comprehension. In this program, students participated in small-group differentiated instruction in three phases. After being grouped according to their academic needs, students participated in read-alouds and discussions, periods of silent reading using books chosen by the students, individualized conferences with the teacher, and a practice activity selected by the teacher. Practice activities varied, but could include uses of technology, discussion groups learning centers, or other small-group or partner work. The authors found that the program was significantly more effective than traditional whole-group instruction using basal texts.

Citing numerous studies, Swanson (2008) notes that most students with learning disabilities, whose needs often differ from the needs of students without learning disabilities, tend to spend the majority of their time in whole-group settings. Swanson asserts that these settings allow fewer opportunities for students to engage in both meaning and code-based instruction at their own levels of academic need. In addition, Swanson notes that comprehension instruction in whole-group settings is often limited since students are typically asked literal comprehension questions and engage in paper and pencil seat work. Swanson recommends that students receive instruction in small groups, a practice that encourages discussion among teachers and students. In general, small-groups constitute social learning environments that are more intimate than whole-group settings and more closely fitted to students' individual academic needs.

Small-group discussion. Classroom discussions are characterized by exchanges among teachers and students. In some classrooms, teachers monopolize conversations, taking far more conversational turns than their students (Cazden, 1978; Sheperd, 2014). Anderson, Wilkinson, & Mason (1991) found, in an analysis of sixth grade reading groups, that students' achievement improved when they were given more opportunities to talk within the context of small groups. This was particularly true for low achieving students. Hogan, Bridges, Justice, and Cain (2011) and Worthy, et. al (2012) assert that when students speak more often in the context of small group discussions, they more frequently make inferences, monitor their own comprehension, and make connections between texts and events in their own lives. Students also experience higher levels of engagement. Nystrand (2006) notes that, in some groups, teachers act as facilitators, guiding instruction and helping to determine topics of discussion. At the same time, they

allow students to extend conversations and provide them with opportunities to discuss their ideas. The author points out, however, that there are quite a few different approaches to using small-group instruction and that some are not as helpful as others in stimulating certain kinds of academic and social growth.

The structure of small groups appears to have an impact on the kinds of discussions that are possible (Childress & Friedkin, 2012; Chinn, Anderson, Waggoner, 2001; Reznitskaya and Glina , 2013). Differences can occur between programs and among classrooms using the same program. Smagorinsky and Fly (1993), during observations of high school students interacting in small groups in two different classrooms, found that students more frequently participated in generating topics for discussion in small-group settings than they did during whole-group discussions. Students in one classroom, however, took more turns, were permitted to elaborate on ideas, and were allowed more opportunities to actively participate in dialogic discussions. In another, the students participated in shorter exchanges and discussions and did not as regularly access sources of knowledge outside of the context of the discussion. Discussions in the classroom including opportunities for extended dialogic exchanges were associated with students' ability to solve problems and to develop frameworks for interpreting texts.

Morocco and Hindin (2002) assert that students, as members of a literacy community, can take up the roles and patterns of discourse used by their teachers during small-group discussions. In an analysis of student and teacher discourse in a middle school literacy classroom, the authors determined that students in a small-group session took up roles within the meeting that the teacher had previously modeled. One student in

particular took leading roles in managing and relating student contributions after the teacher modeled similar actions. Stebick, McCullough, and McKowen (2015) support this finding, adding that some patterns of language use and applications of discussion behaviors (i.e. making eye contact) transfer among classroom contexts. Students sometimes use discourse and perform actions in whole-group settings that they had learned and applied in the context of small-group instruction. These findings suggest the importance of examining the learning environments in which students interact.

Lin, et. al (2015), in a study exploring peer relationships in small-group instructional settings, found that students rated by their peers as central to classroom communities more frequently made connections between ideas proposed during discussions. The authors analyzed conversational turns taken by fourth grade students as they participated in discussions using the Collaborative Reasoning (CR) program. As a part of discussions, students worked to collaboratively determine solutions for problems related to assigned readings. Following discussions, the students evaluated the relative strengths and weaknesses of the exchanges in which they had participated. The authors determined that students identified as central to their peer networks more frequently supported and refuted arguments made by others, making more connections among ideas as they spoke. Additionally, the authors found that relational thinking (making explicit connections between ideas) moved through groups from student to student. Within each session, student arguments and statements of agreement accumulated as students talked. Over the course of ten CR sessions, students used language to indicate agreement or disagreement more frequently. This suggests that students learned to use discourse moves

from one another and that patterns of relational thinking solidified within groups over time.

Some studies suggest that it can be difficult for teachers to make shifts away from conducting recitation/lecture type lessons in order to facilitate differentiated small-group literature-based discussions. Maloch (2002), for instance, found that students returned to patterns of behavior in small-group settings that they had displayed in whole group discussions. They began raising their hands and deferring to teachers' leadership during small-group meetings. Alvermann, O'Brien, and Dillon (1990) found that teachers recognized the benefits of "open-forum" discussions about literature and were able to define the practice when they were interviewed. Though they sometimes acted in accordance with their definitions, they often contradicted them. They spent the majority of their time conducting lecture or recitation type discussions. Teachers rationalized the discrepancy by saying that it was necessary to assess knowledge during instruction and that lecture formats were better suited to that purpose. Maloch (2002) attributes these types of recidivistic behaviors to students' and teachers' collective experiences and histories in the classroom.

Small-group instructional settings allow students opportunities to engage in discussions of the types recommended in literature in the field. Students are able to take more turns talking during discussions and are given the ability to help determine the focus and direction that discussions take. Though small-group instruction is seen as an effective instructional practice, small-group settings vary. Some formats and settings are more effective than others in improving literacy learning. Some of the variation is due to the differences in instructional planning. Students read a wide variety of texts in small

groups, spend more or less time talking, and spend different amounts of time in small groups. Small groups also vary in relation to the social contexts in which they are implemented. Teachers and students bring their own personal histories, understandings, and needs with them to small-group sessions. Patterns of discourse and thinking can be transferred among students in a group. In other words, small-groups are complex social spaces. Within these learning environments, participants enact identities that are linked to language use and participation in social events. The current study aims to examine the identities that students perform and the literacy practices in which they engage as they participate in small-group discussions. The research conducted on the enactment of identities in classroom settings is reviewed below.

Identities and Participation in Effective Teaching Practices

Prior knowledge, experiences, and personal histories appear to be strongly connected with literacy learning. According to Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998), social positioning and the enactment of identities contribute to individuals' histories and base of knowledge. Lewis (1997), Leander and Rowe (2006), and Matthews and Kesner (2003), each provide evidence that social positioning, interactions, and identities influence peer relationships and the construction of meaning in instructional settings. The work of these authors provides a starting point from which to examine the relationships among social learning environments, identities, and literacy practices.

Lewis (1997) finds, in a study aimed at exploring the ways in which conceptions about reading shape discussions about literature, that students' social positions frequently shift as they form and reform relationships around reading and instruction. The positions

that participants in the study took up and resisted had an impact on the group as a whole and the forms that participation took for each individual student.

In an analysis of student interactions during classroom presentations, Leander and Rowe (2006) conclude that students come to understand literacy and identity during complex social interactions. The authors posit that classroom spaces and the meanings that are constructed during class time are not planned and executed by participants; they are “coemergent” (p. 451). Meanings develop as complex associations are made during interactions among participants, texts, and the material space of the classroom.

Matthews and Kesner (2003) found that students’ participation in instruction was determined in part by their social status. Though the students came to class equipped with the cognitive and academic tools necessary to participate, their standing within the classroom largely determined their ability to coordinate with other students and to participate fully in classroom events. In other words, their social identities shaped their classroom experiences.

Institutional labels including *at-risk* or *below grade level* may also prevent some students from participating fully in small-group discussions. Moller (2004) closely analyzed interactions between a focal student and her peers in order to examine this phenomenon. Positioned as an outsider by her classmates, the student had difficulty participating fully in the discussion group. Over time, the student adapted to the small-group instructional setting and was repositioned as a peer. Despite this change, she was seen as being less capable than the other students for several weeks and her responses were ignored or diminished in discussions. As she gained confidence, she was again repositioned in the group. Improving her status, her performance in reading improved as

well. Moller argues that the ways in which the student was positioned had an impact on her ability to participate, and consequently affected her ability to learn over the long term.

Some studies suggest that self-identification also has an impact on student outcomes. Middle school students participating in a study conducted by Hall (2012) were asked to identify themselves as high, average, or low performing readers. They were put into groups based on the identities that they claimed in order to receive comprehension strategy instruction. Though the instruction was the same in each group, the students that identified themselves as high performing readers used different sets of strategies than students that identified themselves as low or average performing readers. Students that identified themselves as high-performing readers but began the school year reading below grade level made the most noticeable academic gains over the course of the study. Identities, this study suggests, help to shape not only patterns of behavior, but influence learning.

While identities and positioning have been shown to influence participation in discussion groups, research suggests that the relationship is complex. One study in particular illustrated this point, examining not only students' identities and the positions that they were offered, but also some of the dynamics of positioning and identity formation that may shape students' participation in classroom life. Framing an analysis of small-group literature discussions using Holland, Lachicotte Skinner, and Cain's (1998) model of positioning and identity in cultural worlds, Maloch (2005) found that participation in classroom discussions was closely linked to students' positions and changing identities.

The study tracked two students over the course of a school year. Initially, the focal students were positioned as struggling students, positions that they took up as they constructed identities that conformed to the position. The students' positions afforded them little access to social capital and control in the context of the classroom. Relationships with the instructor and with other students as well as the students' use of discourse played an important role in determining changes in patterns of participation as the school year progressed. The instructor worked actively to influence the environment in which the students worked, refiguring the classroom in order to increase the students' participation and allow them to reconstruct their identities as students. At the same time, the students worked to reposition themselves in relation to groups by making improvisational moves that challenged positions that had been afforded to them and by conforming to the social norms that defined the discussion groups. According to the author, the structure of the discussion groups in which the focal students participated helped them to acquire social capital and the knowledge of discourse needed to participate more fully in classroom discussions.

Though the physical context of the classroom may be an important factor in structuring interactions in small groups, in addition to those described above, I could find few studies on the subject. Weade and Green (1985) provide some discussion on the topic. The authors argue, using snippets of dialogue pulled from records of classroom observations, that students' interpretations of instructional settings and teachers' expectations help to determine how they come to understand what kinds of actions are possible in the classroom. Instructional materials, the authors posit, may also contribute

to students' understandings of the classroom context. It is argued that students "read" instructional settings in order to understand how they are permitted to talk and act.

Conclusion

The studies described above contribute to our understanding of literacy learning and social learning environments. Research has demonstrated that teachers help to shape that ways that students are viewed as learners, how they interact around texts in the classroom, and how they use classroom materials. Students, as well as teachers, shape classrooms in ways that impact motivation and engagement. Their perceptions and expectations influence academic outcomes.

Studies suggest that small-group instruction and classroom discussions improve students' comprehension of texts. Active engagement and participation in discussions in small-group settings has been positively related to literacy learning, though small-groups sessions vary in quality and structure. Within groups, students learn and use discourse of various types from their teachers and peers. They participate in ways that are related to their experiences in classroom settings. Participation and interactions between participants in small-group settings have an impact on literacy learning. Research has demonstrated that social status, institutional labels, and the ways in which students identify themselves influence participation in discussions and affect academic outcomes. Understanding that small-group discussions can be highly effective in improving literacy learning, it is important to continue examining the ways in which teachers and students participate in these learning environments. My study broadens our understanding of teacher and student talk and interaction in small-group settings. It examines how teachers and students position one another, the identities that they perform as they are positioned,

and the literacy practices that they use in the context of small-group instruction. The information gleaned from this research adds to an understanding of the ways in which social interactions are related to instructional outcomes.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This study sought to examine the identities enacted by teachers and students as they positioned themselves and one another in the context of a literature circle discussion, a literature discussion, and a small-group lesson. It also looked at the literacy practices that students used as they performed these identities. The research questions guiding this study are reprinted here.

What happens as students and teachers interact in small-group settings centered on printed texts? Specifically, this study focuses on the following:

- How do students and teachers position one another and how do they position themselves as they enact identities in the context of small-group literacy settings?
- What kinds of literacy practices are used as students and teachers enact identities in small-group settings?

In order to answer these questions, I employed elements of D/discourse analysis (Gee, 2005, 2011), and multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA) (Kress, 2012). Each of these methods is suited for looking at different aspects of small-group settings. By combining methodologies, I was able to create a more coherent picture of the ways in which participants were positioned by one another and the ways that they positioned themselves as they enacted identities and engaged in literacy practices in small-group settings. My analysis was guided by the theoretical model described in Chapter 1, a model that took into consideration the multi-layered, fluid, and historical definition of identity.

In the sections below, I provide descriptions and explanations of theories and methods associated with critical discourse analysis, focusing in particular on D/discourse analysis (Gee, 2005, 2010, 2014) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Bezemer & Kress, 2009, Kress, 2012, Kress, et al., 2001). A review of research using these methods of critical discourse analysis follows. I then describe the context of the study, the participants, and data that I collected. I explain in detail the procedures that I used to analyze the data, and I discuss the validity of these methods.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis, a family of methodologies that includes MMDA and D/discourse analysis, is based in part on theories of language falling under the umbrella of systematic-functional linguistics (SFA), a set of theories developed by M. A. K. Halliday. In contrast to theories that place precedence on the structure of language (its form), SFA places emphasis on the function of language within society (Rogers, 2004). While the *hard* aspects of language such as meanings implied by choices of verbs, nouns, adjectives, and grammatical structures are examined, the *soft* structures, including more abstract social functions of language are also studied and related to meanings. This is done in order to examine the ways in which language is used to accomplish social tasks. This perspective also assumes that verbal and written utterances are delimited by cultural conventions or constraints (what Halliday terms fields) the generic structure of language in use (modes), and the interpersonal interactions (tenor) in which they are used. It is assumed that social events, institutions, and structures and uses of language are dialectical in nature (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Language both influences social contexts and is influenced by them (Wodak, 1995). Social processes have linguistic properties

(Wodak & Fairclough, 1997) and the use of language has social and political implications (Gee, 2004).

D/discourse Analysis

D/discourse analysis (Gee, 2005, 2010) provides analysts with a set of tools or “thinking devices” (p. 209) that can be used to study Discourses in educational contexts. *Discourses*, as I mention above, are differentiated from *discourses* with a lower case “d.” They are socially constructed and accepted ways of using speaking, listening, writing, and reading (Gee, 2011) and include ways of acting, thinking, interacting (Gee, 2005), dressing, and feeling (Gee, 2011). Tools provided by D/discourse are designed to help analysts to look closely at the characteristics of written and oral texts and help them make inferences about what authors of texts mean and what they are trying to accomplish (Gee, 2005, 2011). The tools are tied to a specific theory of language use.

Gee, in describing D/discourse analysis, stresses the importance of three theoretical precepts. First, words and phrases have situated meanings. Meanings are shaped by individuals’ experiences and their understandings of the contexts in which words and phrases are used. Second, words and phrases are associated with what Gee (2005) calls “Discourse models” (p. 94). These are representations of the world, or in Gee’s words, “storylines, images, [and] explanatory frameworks” (p.61) that are shared among members of a group or community. Third, language is seen as reflexive. It both reflects and constructs what is held to be reality within a social context.

The tools of inquiry described by Gee (2011) are used to examine the ways that situated meanings and Discourse models, along with social practices and social languages (vernacular and professional language, for instance, tied to a specific social group), are

designed, used, and recognized by participants in a social activity. Each tool consists of one or more questions. Some of the tools are designed to help analysts look at broader connections between language use and society. These include, for instance, questions concerning situated meanings or the use of references to other texts (intertextuality). Several of the tools are aimed at looking at how participants shape, create, or influence social situations through the use of building tasks. These include, among others, questions about the ways that aspects of a context are given significance, the identities that are enacted by participants, and the relationships that participants hope to have recognized. Other tools are used to frame analyses, to fill in information that is missing or taken for granted, and for looking at the structure of sentences, phrases, and utterances. A complete list and description of the tools that I used is provided later in this chapter (see Table 1).

D/discourse analysis is not a prescriptive program or a step-by-step set of instructions. Gee (2011) recommends that analysts ask all of the questions (use each tool) to address their data, though some answers may prove more relevant to the specific data than others. While analysts are encouraged to begin working from the more broadly analytic “big picture” (p. 6) questions, they are free to work through the questions in any order that seems appropriate given the nature of the specific research goal and the data being analyzed. Throughout the analysis process, analysts look for converging themes. Themes and research questions are revised as the tools of inquiry are applied to the data. The results of analyses are organized and presented so that they illustrate the themes that have been developed and address the research problem. By carefully analyzing what is written or said within a particular context, researchers come to understand what is being

done with language and how it is being done. Analyses using this methodology are useful in studying the way that social institutions and structures are produced and reproduced through the use of language.

I used the analytic tools provided by D/discourse analysis in my dissertation study to look at the ways that language was used to accomplish things in the context of the classroom, specifically how students and teachers used language to position one another and the ways in which they used language in order to be recognized as performing social identities. Understanding that literacy practices are social constructs used to achieve social goals in relation to texts, D/discourse analysis was also used to identify and describe the literacy practices that students and teachers engaged in during instruction. The analysis, for instance, helped to determine when students were using questions to confirm understandings of texts and when questions were being used for other purposes.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis

While Gee (2005, 2011) provides a methodological framework for analyzing relationships among written and oral texts and society, Kress posits that a complete analysis of the elements of any context is needed in order to understand power relations and the ways in which texts are related to the social world. Developing a methodology referred to as multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA), Kress (2012) posits that all texts are intentionally produced. Gestures, speech, writing, visual imagery, and music (modes) are combined by “meaning-makers” (p. 38) (producers of texts) in order to create a complete and cohesive semiotic unit, or text. Texts, Kress asserts, are both internally and externally coherent. Because texts are assembled in social settings, and because they are structured by conventions developed and maintained by specific groups of people, they

can be systematically analyzed to look for patterns and themes of action, interaction, and interrelation.

MMDA encourages multidisciplinary research. Theoretical assumptions about texts, topics, and society are combined with methods typically used in the social sciences during analyses using MMDA. The methodological processes specific to MMDA can be gathered by reading Kress (2012), Kress, et al. (2001), and Bezemer & Kress (2009). In each of these studies, the researchers began by looking at each mode in a text separately. Sound recordings, video recordings (without sound), and visual images were audited repeatedly. Each text was then examined in its entirety. Kress, et al. (2001) looked for actions and speech patterns repeated by teachers and students in a classroom. Bezemer & Kress (2009) counted the frequency of visual images in a text and analyzed the typography used in each. In each of these studies, the authors looked for structural patterns, repetitions, and changes in the use of sign systems in each mode. Research methods were used, when appropriate, to analyze specific aspects of the modes in each text. Bezemer and Kress (2009), for instance, used a set of tools designed for the analysis of typography borrowed from Stockl (2005). Analysis in each study was recursive. The authors repeatedly revisited the contexts under study in order to look at how meanings in texts were related to other aspects of the context. Kress (2012) provides an apt summary of the processes of inquiry using MMDA. He lists four questions that can be asked about the coherence of texts and their relationship with social contexts and structures. These ask:

- How is the “social” organized?
- What are its salient entities and how are they configured in this instance?

- What links with what, and in what ways?
- What belongs where, in the ensemble of entities in a text?

MMDA was applied in my dissertation study in order to explore the ways in which participants in small group reading instruction used a variety of signs to construct and enact identities. Signs included references to participants using certain pronouns, certain gestures or an individual's physical proximity to other participants, or the use of certain culturally relevant references. By looking for patterns of behavior, action, and signification; repetitions; and changes in the uses of sign systems, I was able to identify and describe identities as they were enacted and as they evolved over time (Kress, 2011).

Mixing Methodologies

While critical discourse analysis frequently draws on theories and methods developed in other areas of the social sciences, methodological approaches from within the field are also regularly combined. Rogers (2002), for example, uses a version of Gee's (2004) concept of Discourses to frame her analysis and Fairclough's (1995) method of analysis to code data in a study on family literacy practices. Young (2004), on the other hand, uses four of Gee's (2004) tools of inquiry to ask questions of her data and components of Fairclough's (1995) theoretical framework to examine masculine Discourses. In an analysis of a popular text by the author Ruby Payne, Dworin and Bomer (2008) incorporate analytic tools from both Fairclough (1995) and Gee (2005) in order to look carefully at the characteristics of the language used in the text. Rather than providing rigid guidelines for analysis, critical discourse analysis allows researchers the flexibility to draw the resources necessary to address complex social problems. Methods of inquiry and analysis are matched, as a part of the methodological process, to the social

issues and contexts that are the focus of study. In research in education, critical discourse analysis is well suited to address the complex issues surrounding the social positioning and the formation and enactment of identities.

I use the theories embedded in D/discourse analysis and MMDA, as they are described above, to conceptualize the formation and enactment of identities and the relations of power that work to position individuals and groups in schools and classrooms. The methodologies provide tools appropriate for analyzing form/function relationships associated with the formation of identities and social positions. Researchers have used critical discourse analysis to look at identity and positioning in social interactions and in written texts. Some of these studies are discussed in the next sections.

Identity. A number of studies can be found that use variations and combinations of methods of critical discourse analysis to explore identity formation in educational contexts. Some analyses are conducted with a focus on written texts while others examine only spoken language. Still others apply a variety of theoretical frameworks to address a range of social problems.

Beach and Anson (1992), in a study focused on the language used by students in a linguistics course, found that participants altered their use of discourse over time to signal allegiance to a group. In this study, peer-dialogue journals were exchanged between pairs of students. Looking at the texts as artifacts of dialogic conversations, the authors focused on instances of intertextuality in the journal entries. The authors found that, over time, the students incorporated elements of their partner's patterns of discourse use.

Brown and Kelly (2001) also found evidence suggesting connections between the use of discourse and the development of identities, though their approach differed

considerably from the approach taken by Beach and Anson (1992). The authors conducted open-ended interviews with 19 African-Canadian high school students. Looking primarily at the content of the students' utterances, they relied on theoretical analysis rather than linguistic analysis to make sense of the data.

Stevens and Hinchman (2011) examined both written and spoken language used by graduate level students participating in a literacy education practicum. Focusing analysis on a single student, interviews, field notes, and artifacts from the practicum were used to develop a description of the student's behavior. The study employed both ethnographic methods and critical discourse analysis. A textual analysis was conducted using analytic tools borrowed from Gee (2010) and procedural recommendations from Fairclough (1989). Relationships among written and oral texts were analyzed and compared. An analysis of the deictics, or pointing words (Gee, 2010), used by the participant, the Discourses drawn on during lessons and interviews, and of the context was used to develop an understanding of the identity being built by the participant. Researchers including Young (2004) and Rogers (2002) have also used observational data alongside interview data in various configurations, as well as combinations of methodological approaches to better understand the complexities of identity formation and maintenance.

Positioning. Researchers use critical discourse analysis to explore social positioning in education through a diverse application of theory and methods. Rogers and Elias (2012), for instance, used methods of critical discourse analysis to explore how students positioned themselves as literate people at home and at school. Additionally, they sought to describe the social languages, discourses, narratives, and identities that the

students applied in these different settings. In interviews with first and second graders, the authors asked students to talk about themselves as readers and writers. Among other things, the students were asked to speak about the kinds of reading and writing activities that they participated in at home and at school and about their reading preferences. Data were analyzed using elements of Fairclough's framework for critical discourse analysis (1992). The authors looked for, and closely examined, the genres (ways of interacting), discourses (ways of representing), and styles (ways of being) represented in the data. They asked questions, for instance, about how the participants used repetition (genre), used pronouns (discourses), and expressed affinity (styles).

Rogers and Elias (2012) found that relationships to others, particularly to mothers, were important for children as they read at home. Genres of text, types of groupings and interpersonal interactions, and rules appeared important to students as they read at school. Participants positioned themselves as readers differently in each setting. While positioning herself as an enthusiastic reader in the context of the home, for instance, one student identified herself as a low performing reader at school. Overall, students tended to position themselves in relation to texts and reading settings. They equated being a reader with participation in certain types of activities and relationships and uses of specific texts and materials. In this study, critical discourse analysis was useful in analyzing interview data in order to examine acts of positioning in two settings.

Peace (2003) used recordings of conversations collected during meetings with a select group of undergraduate psychology students in order to explore the construction and maintenance of gendered identities. The analysis focused on the assertions made by students over stretches of language use at above the level of the sentence (at the

paragraph and text levels and at levels of perceived meaning). The author develops repertory categories for representing the students' use of discourse during the discussions. It was found that, in addition to developing individual identities using discourse, the participants worked to position each other as gendered subjects. Peace argues that the often-contradictory discourses enacted by the students were ideological in nature and worked to position men and women as equals.

In a case study of four urban students performing at different levels of academic proficiency, Dutro, Selland, and Bien (2013) used critical discourse analysis to look at how students positioned themselves and how they were positioned as they engaged in the writing process in the classroom and during high-stakes state testing. The authors found that assessments of the students' writing were not always consistent with the ways in which the students positioned themselves as writers. While one student identified herself as a successful and enthusiastic writer, assessments of her writing identified her as low-performing. Another student positioned himself as low performing while test scores suggested that he was proficient in writing. The authors posit that institutional labels (proficient and not proficient for instance) provide specific storylines that position students in ways that may be counterproductive. These positions may limit the ways in which students can author their own identities as writers. Dutro's, Selland's, and Bien's use of critical discourse analysis demonstrates the facility of the methods for working with a range of data as acts of positioning and identity enactment are examined.

Bergvall and Remlinger (1996) examine both reproduction and resistance to gendered positions within the context of a technological university. Looking primarily at the number of turns taken during conversations and the kinds of discursive moves made

by men and women in the class, the authors identified task-divergent behaviors that occurred during conversations between male and female students. These behaviors, the authors argue, are used to disrupt power relations that positioned male students in relation to a female instructor and the other students. The authors conclude that women engaged in this kind of resistance less frequently. This was attributed to a historical lack of institutional power. The authors' analysis relied on critical discourse analysis as a tool for working through a problem observed in a classroom related to social positioning.

Identity and positioning. One of the benefits of using D/discourse analysis and MMDA to explore issues of identity and positioning is that these methodologies are well equipped to address the complexity inherent in power relations. Rogers and Mosley (2006) take advantage of the analytic tools provided by methods of critical discourse analysis to address this complexity and to draw conclusions about how power relations might be altered or disrupted. The authors analyzed the discourse used by White students in a second grade classroom as they participated in accelerative literacy instruction. The classroom was videotaped and audio recordings were made throughout the school day. The authors kept journals, collected artifacts produced by students and teachers, and conducted informal interviews with students. The study incorporates several methods of analysis, combining elements of ethnographic research, MMDA, and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2003).

Critical discourse analysis gives researchers a body of resources that can be used to explore a range of social issues. Methods and tools provided by MMDA (Bezemer & Kress, 2009, Kress, 2012, and Kress, et al., 2001) and D/discourse analysis (Gee, 2005, 2011) have been combined and used to explore topics including racial discourse, power

relations, gender issues, classroom discourse, identity formation, and social positioning. The flexibility of the methodologies allowed the authors of these studies to apply analytic tools in different ways in order to closely examine the complexities associated with social interactions and texts. In the present study, MMDA and D/discourse analysis are used to analyze a range of data in order to examine how participants position one another and themselves as they enact identities and use literacy practices of various sorts in the context of in small-group settings.

Units of Analysis

Typical of critical methods of discourse analysis including MMDA and D/discourse analysis, my study employed units of analysis at above the level of the word or sentence. Units of analysis included the individually enacted identities and the literacy practices activated by students and teachers. By looking at actions, the construction and use of cultural artifacts, and uses of discourse, I was able to identify episodes in which language and nonverbal sign systems were used to position participants and to enact specific identities in the context of the three different small-group settings. I also identified uses of literacy practices, particularly those that are generally considered desirable in elementary schools.

Context of the Study

This study was conducted at College Preparatory Academy (CPA, a pseudonym), a free-public K-11 urban charter school sponsored by a major university in partnership with a local school district. At the time of data collection, the school was in its 2nd and 3rd years. With no admission criteria, the school served less than 1000 students. 450 students attended classes in grades K-5. A majority of the students were Latino/a and lived in the

neighborhood immediately surrounding the school. 69% of the students came from homes in which Spanish or a language other than English was spoken. 74% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch. Average attendance was at above 95% on a daily basis and discipline referrals were negligible.

Teachers in the elementary grade levels were strongly encouraged to deliver literacy instruction in the context of small-group settings. They received instructional support from a variety of sources in order to improve student achievement and the quality of the instruction that they provided. The teachers met weekly in grade level teams with a school administrator, the professor in residence, and grade level mentors. In these meetings, teachers discussed methods for grouping students, the use of classroom management strategies to allow for small-group sessions, and the analysis of performance data.

Literacy instruction in grades K-5 was delivered to students grouped according to their achievement on the Galileo K-12 Online[®] reading assessment (Assessment Technology, Inc., 2002-2012) and the Developmental Reading Assessment, Second Edition (DRA2) (Beaver & Carter, 2007). During an instructional period referred to as walk-to-reading, students left their homerooms in order to receive instruction alongside students that had met grade level expectations, fell below or approached expectations, or exceeded expectations according to the assessments. Though tracked reading programs frequently place students in a classroom for a school year before reevaluating placement, students at CPA were regrouped at the end of each benchmarking period.

The Participants

The study was conducted using data collected in the spring of the 2011-2012 school year and in the spring semester of the 2012-2013 school year. Data were gathered in a second, a third grade, and a fourth grade classroom. Recordings collected in the second grade classroom were excluded from this study, as I explain below. The participating third and fourth grade teachers, though both within their first two years of teaching during the 2011-2012 school year, came to the school under different conditions and with different types of experiences in the classroom.

In Year 1 (2011-2012), the participating third grade teacher, Mrs. Flores, was in her second year of teaching. As the year progressed she sought assistance from her mentor teacher and me (acting as the literacy coach) to support her as she began facilitating literature circles. Her students met in literature circles once a week, using the intervening time to complete reading and writing assignments as a part of the literature circle framework. Throughout the year, she and I discussed student outcomes, the quality of discussions, and the kinds of interactions that students had as they read and talked together. By the end of the year, Ms. Flores decided to abandon the literature circle format in favor of literature discussions. Her decision was based, in large part, on conversations that we had about student performances. Our observations led us to believe that literature circles were resulting in low-levels of engagement with major themes and ideas in texts. Looking back together at the discussions that students had, we recognized that most student contributions were at a literal level. Students talked, for instance, about how hot it would have gotten without air conditioning in a book about two children lost

in the desert. Students made connections between incidental events and characteristics of texts rather than meaningful connections that led to deeper understandings.

Prior to beginning of Year 2 (2012-2013), Ms. Flores received training in the use of the discussion-based reading program *Junior Great Books*. This program, according to Murphy, et al. (2009), is particularly effective in using classroom discussion to improve critical thinking and reasoning. Ms. Flores used this framework during the first half of each class period. She used literature discussions in the second half of the period. During literature discussions, students read and discussed novels that the teacher had chosen. Students met in literature discussion groups once a week. A different group met on each day of the week. Books were selected based on the reading levels of the students. Levels were determined using DRA assessments. I continued to offer support in improving discussions in my role as the literacy coach.

The fourth grade teacher, Ms. Wilson, was in her first year of teaching in the spring of 2012 (Year 1 of the study). She had been hired through Teach for America and had participated in the program's five-week training program prior to beginning work at CPA. Ms. Wilson provided reading instruction to a group of fourth and fifth grade students that performed at higher levels according to reading assessments in comparison with other students in the grade level. She facilitated literature discussions with my support throughout Year 1. We continually discussed our observations of student conversations and worked to improve the quality of discussions. In the summer preceding Year 2, Ms. Wilson took part in a week-long professional development series on the Common Core State Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). Learning centered on understanding the structure and content of the standards. During

year 2, Ms. Wilson taught the 4th and 5th grade students that had performed at the lowest levels on school-based reading assessments. I continued to work with Ms. Wilson as she labored to meet the needs of students with a broad range of skill levels and proficiencies. Group structures and lessons varied, sometimes including literature discussions, direct instruction, or group practice activities aimed at improving specific skills and strategies.

Data Collection.

The study proceeded over two academic years.

Year 1: Spring 2012. I began collecting data during the spring of the 2011-2012 school year as a part of a large-scale ethnographic study being conducted at the school. Data were solely collected by me. I visited each of the classrooms at least three times each week, collecting field notes describing the work that the teachers were doing and recording observations of students as they worked with teachers during reading instruction. I made audio and video recordings of small-group sessions centered on printed texts during my visits. These recordings were shown to the teachers toward the end of each semester. After watching the recordings, the teachers were asked to comment on the instruction that they were delivering. Audio recordings were made of these unstructured interviews

Year 2: Spring 2013. I continued to observe and provide mentoring and support as the participating teachers met with students in small-group settings during the spring of the 2012-2013 school year. As in the previous year, I made video and audio recordings of the proceedings and continued to collect field notes. A total of 33 recordings were made, though only 18 were transcribed and analyzed and three are described below.

After recording small-group interactions in each of the classrooms, I conducted a second round of unstructured interviews individually with each teacher as we watched the video recordings of the small-group sessions together. By recording small-group sessions in different classrooms during two different school years, I was able to capture and describe a range of episodes of identity enactment and uses of literacy practices within small groups. The classrooms chosen for this study were suited to this purpose given that they each facilitated small-group sessions in different ways and because they each used different types of small-group structures over the course of the two years. These differences allowed me to examine the identities and literacy practices that students used across several small-group settings.

Data Sources

In an effort to gather information about episodes of positioning, the enactment of identities, and the use of literacy practices in small-group settings, data of several different types were collected. These included:

- Audio recordings of small-group sessions. Recordings were made using a digital audio recorder. The recorder was placed on teachers' work surfaces and left to record dialogue during small-group sessions.
- Video recording of small-group sessions. Small-group sessions were captured on video using either an iPad or iPhone.
- Audio recordings of interviews with teacher participants. As teachers watched the videos recorded during small-group sessions in their classrooms, they were asked to comment on the decisions that they made and the instruction that they delivered. The interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder.

- Field notes. I wrote brief memos during small-group sessions. I added to the notes immediately following instructional sessions in order to develop a thick description of the classroom context and the possible meanings embedded in gestures, actions, and uses of discourse observed during the small-group sessions (Geertz, 1973).
- Transcripts of selected small-groups sessions. Audio recordings of small-group sessions were selected for transcription and analysis based on the content of the recordings. I selected recordings that were of a length sufficient to draw inferences about the ways that the participants used language during exchanges, that represented a range of small-group settings (i.e. literature circle, literature discussion, and small-group lesson), and that contained enough student talk (as opposed to reading aloud) to allow for an analysis of the language that the students used. Selected recordings were at least 15 minutes in length, contained episodes in which two or more students spoke more than once, and contained higher quantities of discussion than periods of read-aloud. Exchanges between and among teachers and students in these recordings were generally of more than three or four lines in length. All of the selected recordings also included the teacher as a participant. One session was excluded from this paper, for instance, because the teacher gave directions for participating in the group for most of the recording. Another recording was excluded because the teacher left the group after a couple of minutes in order to work with other students. Data that could be used to make inferences about the way that the teacher positioned the students during this session were more difficult to find. Overall, decisions were based on

the amount of data that could be used to build a case that identifiable acts of positioning or identity enactment had occurred.

- Transcripts of teacher interviews. The teacher interviews were transcribed in order to facilitate a close analysis.
- Instructional materials. Student worksheets and response journals were collected and copied for analysis. These included vocabulary practice activities, worksheets on which students were required to answer questions about the texts that they were reading, and open-ended response sheets on which students recorded their thoughts about their readings.

During each of the small-group sessions under observation, audio recordings were made in order to capture the language that participants used as they interacted in small-group settings focused on printed texts. These data were critical to the study since language is often used to shape social contexts and to enact identities within those contexts (Gee, 2004, Wodak, 2005). Selected recordings were transcribed in order to facilitate data analysis. Since I focused on interactions between students and teachers and among students, I selected recordings of sessions in which the teachers and students participated in higher quantities of verbal exchanges. I transcribed three recordings from each of the classrooms collected during both the first and second phases of data collection. I transcribed a total of 18 recordings, six from the third grade classroom and six from the fourth grade classroom. Six additional recordings collected (and later transcribed) in a second grade classroom were excluded from this study because they predominantly captured long periods of round-robin type reading groups. Students in

these groups did not spend as much time talking to one another or the teacher as they did reading in turns.

Video recordings collected during selected small group sessions were included in the data set. These recordings provided information about the nonverbal interactions that occurred in each of the small-group settings observed as a part of this study. According to Kress (2012) gestures, visual imagery, and other modes of expression, in addition to speech and written text, are combined by “meaning-makers” (p. 38) in order to create a complete, cohesive, and intentionally produced units of meaning. Video recordings were used to provide information about positions, identities, and uses of literacy practices that might not otherwise have become evident in recordings of oral language used during small-group sessions.

In addition to these data sources, vocabulary and comprehension worksheets, blank copies of student response sheets, and any other printed materials used during instruction were collected. These materials provided some information about the figured world in which instruction took place. As a part of the contexts in which literacy learning occurred, some of these materials positioned students and teachers in specific ways. Collection of these materials was important in developing an understanding of the ways in which the participants were positioned and the ways in which they positioned themselves as they enacted identities as well as the literacy practices that they engaged in during reading instruction.

Data Analysis Procedures

In order to develop an understanding of the ways in which participants in each of the small-group sessions were positioned and the ways that they positioned themselves,

to identify and describe the identities that they enacted as they participated in instruction, and to delineate some of the literacy practices in which participants engaged, I took a bottom up approach to analysis (Gee, 2004). Rather than a priori codes in order to distinguish between identities, I analyzed the form and function of language and nonverbal signs in order to look closely at how identities were socially constructed in small-group settings. More than looking at the way that individual words and sentences were used, however, I examined the ways in which language and other signifiers were used together as participants positioned one another and themselves in the context of small-group settings.

Words are associated with different meanings depending on how, when, where, and with whom they are used. Meanings are situated in specific contexts (Gee, 2005). People use words in combination with gestures and other signs and signals to create or convey meanings during social interactions. In my analysis, I looked at how words and other signs were combined and related within specific contexts to make meaning. In one small-group session, for instance, a teacher said, “Yeah, keep thinking [*laughter*]. You're smart,” as she facilitated a literature discussion. The teacher was speaking with a student that had taken some time to answer a question. Participation in the discussion was expected, and the teacher had encouraged each of the students to speak. Using an informal vernacular (contractions and the informal *yeah*), the teacher suggested that she was being friendly. Her laughter reinforced this relationship. Giving a direct command with an implied *you*, however, she acted as a director. She gave instructions for participation. Adding, “You're smart,” she positioned the student as capable of participating and suggested that the student was competent enough to answer. She

provided encouragement. The teacher's words and her laughter, together, were used to draw inferences about what she was trying to do in the context of the literature discussion.

Data analysis proceeded in several recursive stages. Though each type data were analyzed separately, data were frequently revisited and reviewed as new data were examined. Initially, I read transcripts of the audio data collected during small-group sessions while listening to the audio recordings. Notes about the participants' use of intonation contours were made and lines of data were divided in order to reflect pauses, interruptions, and the ways in which words were grouped as the participants spoke. My initial observations and thoughts were also recorded. Later, I reread the transcripts without the help of the audio recordings. I viewed the video recordings in a similar manner, first without audio, and later with audio. After I had viewed the videos several times, I reread the transcripts of the instructional sessions while watching the videos. I took notes about the gestures that the participants used, their proximity to others in the group, and the ways in which they used instructional materials. These notes were reread alongside the transcripts in order to build a more complete picture of what the teacher and the students were doing as they participated in instruction.

D/discourse analysis. I used the tools provided by D/discourse analysis to analyze data recorded in transcriptions of the small-group sessions recorded in classrooms. Following Gee's (2011) recommendations, analytic tools (or sets of questions) were applied to the data. Asking, for instance, about how speakers' intonation contours were used to construct meanings (The Intonation Contour tool), information was

gathered about the ways in which participants used intonation as they spoke to shape the meaning of the words they used.

All of the tools were initially applied to the data. As I repeatedly read through the transcripts, I reviewed each of the questions and recorded initial impressions. Some of the questions did not provide information that was useful in my study. I discontinued use of these tools as the analysis proceeded. The Cohesion Tool, for instance, asks,

How does cohesion work in this text to connect pieces of information and in what ways? How does the text fail to connect other pieces of information? What is the speaker trying to communicate or achieve by using cohesive devices in the way he or she does (Gee, 2011, p. 351)?

I found very few instances in which participants in my study appeared to use cohesion to build identities or to position one another during small-group sessions. This tool was not used to engage in a deeper analysis of the sessions.

As I continued to reread the transcripts, analysis focused on the tools that yielded information most closely related to the research questions and whose answers converged. At first, the broadly analytic *big picture* questions (Gee, 2011) were asked of the data. Using the Discourses tool, I looked at the ways that teachers and students acted and spoke in the context of small-group settings in order to enact specific identities. The Figured Worlds Tool was applied in order to explore the ways in which the participants used language to construct figured worlds. The Social Languages Tool was used in order to look at the ways in which the words, phrases, and sentences used by participants were connected with specific social languages, languages associated with particular identities. I focused the analysis using additional tools as necessary. To analyze one episode, for

instance, in which the teacher frequently used pronouns and other “pointing words,” to refer to herself and the other participants (Gee, 2011, p. 25), I applied the Deixis tool, asking about how certain words were used to connect speech and the immediate context in which the language was used. A complete list of the tools that I used after an initial sweep of the data is represented in the table below. In order to represent the questions as accurately as possible, Gee (2011, p. 346-354) is quoted throughout the table. Portions of the questions have been abbreviated due to a lack of space in this paper.

Table 1. Discourse Analysis Tools Used

Tool	Questions
The Deixis Tool	How are deictics being used to tie what has been said to a context and to make assumptions about what listeners already know or can figure out? What deictic like properties are regular words taking on in a context? What aspects of their specific meanings need to be filled in from context?
The Intonation Tool	How does a speaker's intonation contour contribute to the meaning of an utterance? What idea units did the speaker use? What information did the speaker make salient? What information did the speaker background as given or old by making it less salient?
The Frame Tool	After filling in all aspects of the context that are relevant to the meaning of the data, find out anything additional about the context in which the data occurred and see if this changes your analysis.
The Doing and Not Just Saying Tool	What is the speaker saying and what is he or she trying to do? Keep in mind that he or she may be trying to do more than one thing.
The Vocabulary Tool	What sorts of words are being used in terms of whether the communication uses a preponderance of Germanic words or of Latinate words. How is this distribution of word types functioning to mark this communication in terms of style (register, social language)? How does it contribute to the purposes for communicating?

<p>The Why This Way and Not That Way Tool</p>	<p>Why has the speaker built and designed with grammar in the way in which he or she did and not in some other way. Always ask how else this could have been said and what the speaker was trying to mean and do by saying it the way in which he or she did and not in other ways.</p>
<p>The Context is Reflexive Tool</p>	<p>How is what the speaker is saying and how he or she is saying it helping to create or shape [possibly even manipulate] what listeners will take as the relevant context? How is what the speaker is saying and how he or she is saying it helping to reproduce contexts like this one (e.g., class sessions in a university), that is, helping them to continue to exist through time and space? Is the speaker reproducing contexts like this one unaware of aspects of the context that if he or she thought about the matter consciously, he or she would not want to reproduce? Is what the speaker is saying and how he or she is saying it just, more or less, replicating (repeating) contexts like this one or, in any respect, transforming or changing them?</p>
<p>The Significance Building Tool</p>	<p>How are words and grammatical devices being use to build up or lessen significance (importance, relevance) for certain things and not others?</p>
<p>The Activities Building Tool</p>	<p>What activity (practice) or activities (practices) is this communication building or enacting? What activity or activities is this communication seeking to get others to recognize as being accomplished? What social groups, institutions, or cultures support and norm (set norms for)</p>

	whatever activities are being built or enacted?
The Identities Building Tool	What socially recognizable identity or identities is the speaker trying to enact or to get others to recognize? How does the speaker's language treat other people's identities, what sorts of identities the speaker recognizes for others in relationship to his or her own? How is the speaker positioning others, what identities the speaker is "inviting" them to take up.
The Relationships Building Tool	How are words and various grammatical devices being used to build and sustain or change relationships of various sorts among the speaker, other people, social groups, cultures, and/or institutions.
The Situated Meaning Tool	What situated meanings do words and phrases have? What specific meanings do listeners have to attribute to these words and phrases given the context and how the context is construed?
Social Languages Tool	How does communication use words and grammatical structures to signal and enact a given social language?
Figured World Tool	What are typical stories or figured worlds the words and phrases of the communication assuming and inviting listeners to assume. What participants, activities, ways of interacting, forms of language, people, objects, environments, and institutions, as well as values, are in these figured worlds?
The Big "D"	How is the person using language, as well as ways of acting,

Discourse	interacting, believing, valuing, dressing, and using various objects,
Tool	tools, and technologies in certain sorts of environments to enact a specific socially recognizable identity and engage in one or more socially recognizable activities? What Discourse is this language part of? What kind of person (what identity) is this speaker or writer seeking to enact or get recognized? What sorts of actions, interactions, values, beliefs, and objects, tools, technologies, and environments are associated with this sort of language within a particular Discourse?

Note: Adapted from *How to Do Discourse Analysis* by J. P. Gee, 2011, p. 346-354.

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As I asked questions of the data, I looked for converging themes and patterns in order to begin making sense of what the participants meant as they spoke and what they were trying to accomplish by speaking. I paid particular attention to themes related to the enactment of identities, social positioning, and the use of academic literacy practices. A very brief representation (a snapshot) of the process that I used to analyze some of the data around one student’s identity is provided in Appendix A.

In addition to using D/discourse analysis to look at data collected during small-group sessions, I used the method to work through data collected during unstructured interviews. A process similar to one used with the small-group data was used to analyze interview data, this time with an eye toward themes related to the positioning of students within small groups and the identities enacted by the participating teachers. Since teachers were asked to talk about the decisions that they made while engaging in small-

group sessions, I looked for converging themes centered on these aspects of the instructional settings.

MMDA was used to analyze data collected during videotaped sessions. I repeatedly audited each of the taped sessions, focusing my attention on different modes of communication during each audit. In one viewing, for instance, I focused on the gestures used by teachers and students and the ways in which they positioned their bodies in relation to other participants. In another viewing, I focused on the inflections that the participants used as they spoke to one another. During each audit, I actively looked for structural patterns, repetitions of behaviors and uses of verbal and nonverbal signs, and changes in the use of sign systems in each mode. Again, I looked for converging themes and patterns in an effort to make sense of what the participants were trying to do as they interacted during instruction.

I also used MMDA to analyze the worksheets, response sheets, and other physical artifacts produced for use in small-group settings and artifacts created during small group sessions. I looked for repetitious uses of language in the worksheets and response sheets, repeated uses of graphics and other visual symbols, and uses of common formats. I interpreted repetitions as signs that information, images, or concepts were important to the producer of the text. This information was used to draw inferences about the ways in which students were positioned and the language practices that teachers and students employed as they worked in small groups. Throughout the analysis, I repeatedly revisited the transcribed, videotaped, and physical data in order to look at how meanings in each set of data were related to other aspects of the context. The results of this analysis represent a coalescence of the data, a collection of converging themes related to the

participants' enactment of identity, acts of positioning, and students' uses of literacy practices.

Validity

Classrooms are complex social environments. Students and teachers bring rich personal histories and understandings to school with them. They make choices about how they would prefer to be seen by others and about how they position one another as they travel through classroom settings. They interact around instructional materials and use language and gestures in a variety of ways in order to position themselves and others in the context of classroom. They enact identities and use a variety of literacy practices while participating in social exchanges around texts. The purpose of this study is to explore some of the acts of positioning, enactments of identities, and applications of literacy practices recorded in several selected small-group literacy sessions.

Understanding that these social events were complex in nature, the validity of the study hinges on the extent to which the analysis achieved convergence, agreement, and coverage. The analysis also needed to closely examine the structure of the language used by the participants (Gee, 2005).

Convergence, which is described by Gee (2005) as the degree to which the answers to the questions asked during the analysis are in agreement or are related, was achieved in this study by using each of the 27 analytic tools during data analysis. As the analysis progressed, I focused, in particular, on identity enactment, the use of social languages, the Discourses used by the participants, and the figured worlds that developed. I looked for repetitious uses of gestures and signs as well as structural patterns suggestive of certain kinds of identity enactment and positioning. I looked for answers to questions

and for patterns that converged or were in agreement in order to make determinations about meanings. In one case, for instance, I found that answers to questions about the Discourses used by a student were suggestive of an identity as a cooperating participant and discussion leader. I found similar answers to questions about the social languages that he used, the identities that he enacted, and the deictics and pronouns that he used. The answers to each of these questions converged in ways that supported my analysis.

Agreement, another element of validity, involves the extent to which members of the Discourses represented in the data agree about how language is used in the social context under study. My experience as an elementary school teacher has helped me to become particularly familiar with the social languages used in classrooms, and, additionally, contributed to my capacity to improve agreement. As I conducted interviews with teachers, I collected additional data that helped to identify, define, and name social languages that were used during sessions. Asking teachers to talk about what they were thinking during small-group sessions, I further added to the rate of agreement present in the analysis. Questioning one teacher, for instance, about her use of the phrase *what do you think*, I was able to better identify the social language that she was employing as she enacted an identity during a small-group session.

Coverage, or the extent to which the analysis can be used with similar data (Gee, 2005), was achieved in this study by cross-checking and analyzing a large body of data. Though only three small-group settings are described below (a literature circle discussion, a literature discussion, and a small-group instructional session), analyses were initially conducted with 18-recorded instructional sessions. The questions asked during the analysis were useful and relevant in each session, suggesting thorough coverage.

The three sessions described in my dissertation were chosen because they were representative of themes that I observed across the data. In most of the sessions, for instance, I noted that teachers took more conversational turns than any one student and students typically read directly from worksheets. Sessions included periods in which students answered questions that other students had posed and the teachers worked to keep conversations going. The sessions described below included each of these themes. The selected sessions also represented a range of small-group settings (i.e. literature circle, literature discussion, and small-group lesson). They were chosen in an effort to explore some of the different ways in which students were positioned and the variety of identities that they enacted as they participated in literacy practices of different sorts. The chosen sessions contained enough student talk (as opposed to reading aloud) to allow for a detailed and complete description of how the participants used language to enact specific identities and engage in certain literacy practices.

The details of the linguistic structures used in each setting were carefully analyzed, contributing to the validity of the analysis. Among other elements of the language used by the participants, I examined the speech roles that participants took, the deictics they applied, the expletives that they used, and the grammatical structure of the phrases that they uttered. I considered the situated meanings of words and intonation contours that colored the words that were spoken. The analysis considered relationships between the form that language and signs took in the recorded small-group settings and the function of the language in the context of each classroom during the sessions.

By looking for convergence among the answers to questions, by seeking agreement concerning language use and meanings, by working toward improving the

coverage of the analysis, and by closely examining linguistic details, I sought to improve the validity of the overall analysis described below. Intended as a way of exploring acts of positioning during small-group literacy instruction, the identities enacted by participants, and the literacy practices that they used, this study does not represent a singular and indelible truth concerning literacy instruction. Rather, it is intended as an interpretation of what occurred during small-group instruction over the course of two years in a pair of elementary classrooms. The results of the analysis follow.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The results of the D/discourse analysis and MMDA focus on the ways teachers and students positioned themselves and one another and the literacy practices that they used in three different small-group settings. They are presented in three subsections. In each subsection, I focus on a single small-group setting, each including a teacher and at least three students. In the first subsection, I describe the results of an analysis of data collected in a third-grade classroom in the first year of the study. Here, I pay particular attention to two participants in a literature circle discussion, Ryan (a third grade student) and Ms. Flores, his teacher. In the second subsection, I focus on a session recorded in the same classroom, but in the second year of the study. Participants in this session interacted in the context of a literature discussion. In the last subsection, I focus on a session recorded in a fourth-grade classroom in the second year of the study. In this session, Ms. Wilson (the teacher) and three of her students interacted during a small-group session on using a graphic organizer to understand a piece of informational text.

In each subsection, I call particular attention to the interrelated nature of literacy practices, figured worlds, and teachers' and students' identities. I discuss some of the ways in which figured worlds positioned participants in sessions and how the figure worlds themselves were influenced by the identities that the participants performed. I describe the identities that the participants enacted and the ways in which these identities were related to specific literacy practices. I also discuss how figured worlds and identities delimited engagement in these literacy practices.

Ms. Flores: Year 1

In this section, I describe a literature circle discussion that occurred in Ms. Flores' third-grade classroom in Year 1. During this session, she met with five students in order to discuss an assigned reading. In conversations with her mentor, an experienced third-grade teacher in the next room, Ms. Flores determined that her students needed to become proficient in discussing texts. Additionally, she felt, they needed to become more adept at making connections among texts, visualizing imagery while reading, asking questions, thinking through the meanings of words, and summarizing readings. The figured world that developed as Ms. Flores worked toward these ends is described in the next section.

Ms. Flores' literature circle. In both the first and second year of this study, students at the school were assigned to classes during a period commonly referred to as walk-to-reading. Sometimes they worked with their homeroom teachers and sometimes they were assigned to other teachers in the elementary wing. During this period, students were grouped according to their performance on school level criterion-referenced tests. In each year, Ms. Flores worked with students that had received the highest scores on the Galileo K-12 Online© (Assessment Technology, Inc., 2002-2012) pre-assessment. Though not all of Ms. Flores' students had scored in the *exceeds expectations* range on the assessment, they had outperformed two-thirds of their peers. Third, fourth, and fifth-grade teachers generally referred to this group of students as the *high group* (Field notes, Oct., 2011).

Within her walk-to-reading class, Ms. Flores grouped students and selected books for use in literature circles based on students' reading levels, determined primarily

according to their performance on the *Developmental Reading Assessment* (DRA 2, 2005). Literature circles met once per week.

The figured world: Ms. Flores' literature circle. During the session, Ms. Flores and her students participated in a discussion around the novel *Because of Winn Dixie* (DiCamillo, 2000). They used a set of worksheets as a resource and guide. The worksheets, as well the seating arrangement and the vocabulary associated with the literature circle, helped to evoke a specific figured world. I refer to this world as *Ms. Flores' Literature Circle*. These elements of the classroom context, as well as the general classroom environment, are described below.

Classroom environment. Ms. Flores' classroom was located in a hallway next to another third-grade classroom and across from two fourth-grade classrooms. The hallway branched off of a large, open atrium. Though windowless, the room felt bright and warm. Yellow, green, and red sheets of butcher paper hung on the wall as a backdrop for student work and student-generated charts. Though modest in size, the classroom was able to accommodate Ms. Flores' desk, around 25 student desks, and a horseshoe table. Enough room was left empty that all of the students could sit in a group as they participated in class meetings or read-alouds. Student desks were arranged in groups of four and six so that they formed islands. While at their desks, students could easily look at and talk to one another. A floor-to-ceiling partition divided Ms. Flores' classroom from the other third-grade classroom. The partition could be opened by a few feet to create a door between the rooms, or wider to join the rooms into a single, large classroom space. Ms. Flores and her mentor teacher often opened the partition to talk rather than using their

classroom doors. Student backpacks and containers full of student work covered tables and shelves against the partition.

When not participating in literature discussions, the students participated in a range of activities aimed at improving literacy learning, skills, and strategies. They listened to mini-lessons in which Ms. Flores modeled methods for thinking about reading and writing. They completed research projects and word-study activities. They wrote in response to prompts and made journal entries on topics of their own choice. Literature discussions were generally held at the beginnings of class periods, prior to whole-group meetings and independent practice activities.

Seating arrangement. In Year 1, Ms. Flores conducted all literature circles on the floor of her classroom. In a carpeted area to one side of the classroom that had been left clear of tables, desks, and chairs, the students sat facing one another in a rough circle. During the session described in this section, Ms. Flores sat on the floor as well, facing the classroom and the classroom door as she worked alongside the students. This seating arrangement suggested that the participants should talk to one another. Where students in a more formal setting (like at a horseshoe table) might have felt obliged to talk only with the teacher, this less formal seating arrangement suggested that students could talk to one another. Sitting in a circle, the teacher was not positioned as the focal point of the lesson. The students did not have to look up at her or focus attention exclusively in her direction.

Literature circle role sheets. Four or five students worked together to read and discuss texts during Ms. Flores' literature circles. During discussions, students fulfilled predetermined roles. A student acting as the *Word Wizard*, for instance, was given responsibility for finding and guiding discussions about unfamiliar vocabulary while an

Illustrator was asked to draw a picture of an important part of a story. The students were provided with thin, bound booklets of the workbook-like role sheets associated with literature circles (Daniels, 2006). An example of the role sheets that Ms. Flores distributed to students is printed here (Super Teacher Worksheets, 2013). The sheet describes the role of a *Discussion Leader*.

Figure 2. Discussion Leader Role Sheet

Name: _____ Book Title: _____
 Date Due: _____ Pages: _____ to _____

Literature Circle Role

Discussion Leader

Your job:
 Write questions for your group to discuss. The questions should have to do with the section of the book you're reading. Be sure your questions are interesting and open-ended so everyone will be able to answer it in their own way.

Examples: Were you surprised when ___? Why or why not?
 Do you think the main character made a good choice when he/she ___?
 Why do you think the main character decided to ___?

When you meet with your group:
 You will read your questions to the group and give everyone a chance to answer. After everyone has answered, share your answer with the group.

Question #1: _____

 Your Answer: _____

Question #2: _____

 Your Answer: _____

Question #3: _____

 Your Answer: _____

Super Teacher Worksheets - www.superteacherworksheets.com

Figure 2. Discussion Leader Role Sheet Used in Ms. Flores Class in Year 1. By Super Teacher Worksheets, 2015. Copyright 2015 by Super Teacher Worksheets Printable Reading Worksheets

The sheets named students' roles, gave explicit directions for fulfilling the roles, and suggested the length and number of responses that students should give while

working within the role. Underneath the words *Literature Circle Role* on the sheet printed above for instance, the words *Discussion Leader* (the name of the role) were printed in a large banner. This title distinguished the role from each of the others and made it one that could be taken up by students in a group.

Directions for fulfilling the role were printed beneath the heading. On the *Discussion Leader* sheet, the following words listed directions for participating in a literature circle: “You will read your questions to the group and give everyone a chance to answer. After everyone has answered, share your answer with the group.” By saying “you will,” a direct command, the sheet invited students to participate by completing specific actions. Listing three individual steps and using the word *then*, the directions suggested that students complete these steps in a particular order. The language used in the instructions set up the figured world by laying out procedures for participating and creating a storyline in which students completed a series of tasks.

Space was provided on each role sheet for students to record their work. The amount of space allotted for students’ responses suggested that a certain quantity of writing was required as a part of individual roles. On the example above, lines for three questions and answers were printed below the directions, requiring students to generate no more than three responses. This pattern of print was repeated on each page of the booklet. The *Word Wizard* role sheet, for instance, named the role, listed directions, and suggested a number of responses. Printed with only two spaces in which to record words, it suggested the number of words that could be discussed during a literature circle session.

Participant roles and language. The length and form that the students' reports took during the lesson conformed to the guidelines outlined by the role sheets. During the literature circle, students gave reports using their role sheets, responded to questions, and then ended their turns. When not reporting, students sometimes added information or commented on the role reports being given. The snippet below illustrates this progression. A portion of this excerpt has been cut due its length. The location of the edit is marked with the words *moments later*.

Michael: Question one, were you surprised when they said there were mice in the building? (*falling intonation*)

Olivia: No.

Ryan: No.

Ms. Flores: Why not?

Ryan: Cause it was just mice, that happens everyday, right? (*rising intonation*)

moments later

Michael: Question two. Did you think it was funny when Ms. Fran thought Winn Dixie was a bear (*falling intonation*).

Olivia: Winn, Dixie, hmm.

Ryan: Yeah, the only thing that was funny when she fell down. That's it.

Olivia: Nnnn, yes (*rising intonation*).

During this portion of the discussion, Michael reported by reading the two questions that he had written on his sheet. After several of the students contributed answers to each of

the questions, Michael ended his turn by saying, “That’s all. I don’t have any questions anymore.”

With some variation from report to report, each of the students followed a similar format as they took turns reading from their role sheets, suggesting that the pattern was considered normal or acceptable in the context of the literature circle. Olivia, for instance, reported having found and defined two unfamiliar vocabulary words, the same as the number of lines on her role sheet. She then ended her turn saying, “So who was the, wait, who was the illustrator?” Following the format provided by the role sheets and providing information in response to questions, the students stayed within and reinforced a figured world in which they helped to introduce and discuss topics, provided some support or information about their roles, and proposed ending points for discussions.

Participant identities. During the literature circle, Ms. Flores enacted an identity as an impelling facilitator. Alexis, Olivia, Michael, and Katherine performed identities as (respectively) the Illustrator, the Word Wizard, the Discussion Leader, and the Summarizer. Named for literature circle roles, each of these identities was associated with somewhat similar uses of language and gestures. Ryan enacted an identity named for a role as well, the Story Connector, but his identity was layered with that of a disruptor. These identities and the ways in which participants positioned one another are described below.

Ms. Flores: Identity and positioning. At the opening of the session, the students gathered their pencils, their copies of the novel, and their literature circle role sheets and settled themselves in a circle on the carpet. Ms. Flores sat down, too, listening to the discussion. As the students talked about the novel and their roles, Ms. Flores frequently

used the word *okay* to position students as informed participants. *Okay* was used a total of 14 times during the session. The word was situated, most frequently, at the beginnings of clauses and was used immediately after statements made by students. It was used primarily as a neutral recognition of students' statements or as a sign of acceptance.

In one instance, Ms. Flores used *okay* to acknowledge an answer that Ryan offered in relation to a question that Michael had asked. Saying, "Okay. What do you guys think?" she appeared to use the word to keep the discussion going after acknowledging Ryan's answer. While an evaluative remark like, "Good job," may have indicated an end point to an exchange, *okay* suggested an acknowledgement of a response without saying that it was or was not satisfactory. At another point in the session, she used *okay* after Michael and Ryan guessed at the meaning of a phrase. Here, Ms. Flores followed *okay* with the question, "Did you hear her sentence?" She accepted the answers that the students gave, but directed Michael and Ryan to think about the context in which the expression was used. At the same time, she implied (rather than explicitly stated) that the students should continue talking. Ms. Flores used *okay* in an identity as an impelling facilitator, a guide (rather than the sole authority) inviting students to continue talking. More than just asking students to respond and imposing an order of activity on the session, she impelled students to continuously participate in the discussion.

I categorized the majority of the Ms. Flores' conversational turns as *demanding* speech acts (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). *Demanding* speech acts, in contrast to *giving* speech acts, suggest that listeners should supply information, goods, or services. In some cases, Ms. Flores made direct commands. Telling Olivia, for instance, that she needed to consult with the other students about the meaning of a word, she said, "Ask the group."

Olivia was obliged to respond by calling on the other participants to help define the word. Ms. Flores' command was preceded by the clause "before you give a response." This utterance suggested an order of action and reinforced the idea that Olivia should respond in a particular way.

At times, Ms. Flores used interrogative sentence structures in conjunction declarative or imperative structures to take *demanding* speech roles. Toward the end of the discussion, for instance, Ms. Flores asked the students to continue to talk about the book rather than about the roles that they would take in the next session. She said, "Oh, I know, but we're not. About what happened recently? (*rising intonation*) Okay. Go for it." She began this turn with the expletive *oh*, interrupting Michael and demanding attention. She followed with the conjunction *but* to contradict his assertion that it was time to assign roles. The deictic *we* suggested that she was speaking for and to the group. Her question, which concerned what he had read between sessions, served as a request for information. Ending her turn with the direct command "go for it," she invited Michael to continue talking. Taking a demanding role by making commands and imposing an order on the content of turns, she positioned the students in giving roles. They were to provide information and complete a series of tasks associated with the literature circle. At the same time, she positioned herself as a facilitator, the person charged with guiding the literature circle and eliciting responses to prompts.

Ms. Flores explicitly and implicitly stated that the students were supposed to make key decisions during the session. At one point, after a student hesitantly suggested a meaning for a word, she said, "What do you think? It's up to everybody." During this turn, she used the deictic *you* to indicate the students as a whole rather than a single

student. She opened the floor to continued discussion. She continued by saying *it* (the answer) was for the group as a whole (*everybody*) to determine. By phrasing her demand this way, Ms. Flores put responsibility for meaning making in the hands of the students. She used similar language several more times in the lesson. Asking, “What do you think,” and, “What about you guys,” during several exchanges, she suggested that the students were in charge of continuing the conversation and evaluating responses. Using this type of language while acting as an impelling facilitator, Ms. Flores prompted students to add to the discussion and positioned the students as individuals helping to construct meaning.

While enacting this identity, Ms. Flores helped to shape the figure world evoked by the role sheets and the actions that students took as they reported from within their roles. Toward the end of the literature circle, Ms. Flores encouraged students to choose their own roles and to create their own assignments for the next session. Saying, “Go ahead and switch your roles boys and girls,” she directed the students to move forward, to *go ahead*, in reassigning roles. Using the vocative (address) *boys and girls* rather than more inclusive language like *we should* or *let’s*, she placed responsibility for the task on the students. By doing so, she reminded the students of their jobs as group members. She also suggested that the roles themselves were important in the literature circle.

As an impelling facilitator, Ms. Flores gave directions for participating in the session and suggested that students participate in particular ways. She encouraged students to continue discussions about topics introduced as a part of role reports. Rather than telling the students that they were right or wrong or providing students with answers to questions, she acknowledged responses and asked students to contribute to

conversations. She reinforced the directions printed on the role sheets while positioning the students as being in charge of providing topics and information. The students, positioned by Ms. Flores in the figured world, enacted the identities described in the next section.

Olivia, Michael, Alexis, and Katherine: Literature circle participants. At the beginning of the literature circle, Ms. Flores sat with her back to the wall, resting on her right hand with her legs tucked to one side. Michael sat across from her. He crossed his legs, rested his elbows on his knees, and held his role sheet booklet in front of him with both hands. Alexis and Katherine sat in similar positions, though they had placed their booklets on the floor in front of them. Ryan and Olivia both kneeled on the carpet. Ryan flipped through his role sheet booklet, scanning pages as they went by. Finding the page, Ryan opened the session by reading from his role sheet.

Ryan: Well who goes first? Me?

Olivia: *(audible sigh)* Me.

Ryan: I'll go first. *(Humming)* I'm the Life Connector *(meaning the Story Connector)*. Next we're gonna... *(rising intonation)*... I learned from the story *(rising intonation)*... when at the end, India and Opal are together *(rising intonation)* something fam, familiar, something familiar happened in another story, in *Charlotte's Web*, the girl and the pig. I don't know the girl's name.

Giving a role report by reading from a role sheet was expected during the literature circle. In their identities as the Story Connector, Word Wizard, Discussion Leader, Illustrator, and Summarizer, each of the students completed this activity.

Also as a part of enacting these identities, the students talked about the topics introduced during the literature circle. Olivia responded to Ryan's report by adding information. Saying, "Fern is her name." she acknowledged Ryan's contribution and helped to clarify his statement. She included him in the discussion and positioned him as the Story Connector, a fellow participant in the literature circle. Adding, "'Cause I am, I'm reading that book, too," she connected herself to Ryan through a common interest or assignment.

Olivia was next to share a role report. She read directly from her sheet, declaring that she had found an unfamiliar word and a peculiar phrase in the novel, *pews* and *furry bullet*. The students spent some time talking about the meaning of the latter. Ryan proposed that the phrase referred to an unimpeded projectile saying, "Free bullet? Oh, um, a bullet that has nothing in its way." He clarified by adding, "I mean a bullet that's nothing in its way (*falling intonation*) it just keeps on going and going until it gets it, and nothing will stop it." Michael contributed to the discussion, submitting that *furry bullet* was, "From like a tracking missile." Omitting the subject of the sentence, Michael signaled that he was elaborating on Ryan's assertion. Katherine, offering a counterproposal at Ms. Flores' suggestion, said simply, "Expression," meaning that the phrase was not to be taken literally. Acting as the Story Connector, Discussion Leader, and the Illustrator, the students recognized the contributions made by each of the other students and helped to answer questions posed throughout the session. They offered counterproposals and elaborated on contributions made by others.

I observed similar uses of language as the students responded to reports delivered by Michael and Alexis. Michael (as the Discussion Leader) asked the group if they had

been surprised that mice had appeared in the main character's church. After some discussion on this topic, he asked if the students had thought it funny that another character had mistaken Winn Dixie (a dog) for a bear. During these exchanges, Olivia asserted that mice were a normal occurrence in some places, but not in others. She said, "Wait, yes. Well no, 'cause in my house there wasn't any mice but in Africa (*rising intonation*), where I lived, there was a bunch of mice, but here there aren't." Alexis disagreed saying, "Um, because some stores have mice and it said it (*the church*) was a store in the beginning." Each of these students, in identities as the Word Wizard and the Summarizer, offered counterproposals and additional information about the topic.

After Michael submitted that he was done with his report, Ms. Flores asked Alexis to share her illustration. Alexis turned her role sheet toward the group and placed it on the floor. Katherine and Olivia moved from sitting and kneeling positions in order to look at her drawing more closely. On all fours, they moved toward the illustration and peered down at the drawing. After a moment, Ryan joined them. The students spent some time talking about the illustration.

Michael: It's (*the Illustrator's drawing*) when Winn Dixie made the mess.

Olivia: NO (*rising inflection*). I think it's when he was trying to get the mouse.

Michael: It's just when Winn...

Olivia: 'Cause, 'cause why would there be a cat there (*falling intonation*).

Ryan: But there, they...

Alexis: It's when they, um, it says in the book that, um, he was taking out all the toilet paper and he was ripping all of the cushions of the, um, couch.

Making the drawing the subject of the sentence, Michael proposed that the picture represented a particular event in the story. Olivia forcefully disagreed and posited that the drawing was of the events that occurred in the main character's church. She used the words *I think* to submit that her counterproposal was open to discussion. Olivia then posed a question, reinforcing that the idea that she was seeking elaboration or confirmation of an idea. Alexis ended the discussion by explaining what she had drawn. She referred to the focal text and described an event in the narrative. Using the contraction *it's*, she signaled that she shared a common body of knowledge with the other participants; that they all knew what *it* was. She positioned herself and the other participants as parts of the group.

Throughout the session, the participants looked at one another as they spoke. They did not focus attention exclusively on the teacher. As Olivia introduced unfamiliar vocabulary, the students looked in her direction, periodically looking at their copies of the novel. As the students talked about Alexis' drawing, they alternated between looking at the drawing and looking at one another. This suggests that the students were acting as a group rather than as individuals responding exclusively to a teacher's questions.

Ryan: Story Connector and disruptor. While Ryan acted as the Story Connector, his identity was layered with another, that of a disruptive student. This identity came into the foreground at times and receded at others. By delivering a report, just as each of the other students had, Ryan acted as a Story Connector, a fellow student reporting the

outcomes of an assignment and participating in conversational exchanges as a part of a literature circle. Ryan kicked off the literature circle by identifying his role. While he might have said something like, “I’ll do my report,” or, “Here is what I wrote,” he said instead, “I’m the Life Connector (*meaning the Story Connector*).” Using the contraction *I’m*, he closely associated himself with the role. Olivia took up the topic, though for only one conversational turn, in response to Ryan’s report. Her response signaled an acceptance of his identity.

Throughout the discussion, Ryan, like the other students, commenting on the reports made by others. He elaborated on ideas and responded to requests for information. He also made counterproposals as ideas were passed around the group. During the discussion of the Illustrator’s drawing, for instance, Ryan posited that, “No, actually, I think it was him, it was him howling in the cave, and he was like OWWW. But he was a dog.” Ryan, in this statement, added the word *actually*, a counterproposal to Olivia’s assertion that the drawing represented a dog chasing a mouse. He followed up with the words *I think*, suggesting that he was proposing an alternative answer rather than giving an answer that he was sure was correct (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). This clause left interpretation of the drawing up to the other students as well. During portions of the session, Ryan acted as a cooperating group member, a Story Connector.

At several points, Ryan used gestures that suggested a disruptive identity. Early in to the session for instance, while the group was discussing the meanings of the words that Olivia had brought to their attention, Ryan turned around and crawled away from the group. He interrupted Olivia’s report. After returning to the group and taking part in the exchange that Michael had initiated as the Discussion Leader, he smiled widely, and

began bouncing up and down with his fists raised. During this episode, Ryan disrupted Michael's report and interfered with the flow of the discussion.

Ryan used verbal language, in addition to gestures and behaviors, to enact a disruptive identity. Toward the end of the session and after all reports had been given, for example, he made several evaluative comments about two of the other participants' statements. During a discussion about whether or not mice are pests, he said that he thought that it was funny that Olivia felt that finding a mouse in the sink was disgusting. The exchange is reprinted below.

Ryan: Ah, ha. That's the funny part, when you get grossed out.

Ms. Flores: Alright, any other questions or any other connections, er anything?

Olivia: How are mice disgusting?

Ms. Flores: I don't know if I see them I would get grossed out.

Ryan: You could, the, the gross thing is the when you're not, when you are not gross about mice in your sink.

Olivia: I think they're cute. (*Ms. Flores and Olivia laugh*)

Ryan: The gross, the thing that's gross to me, when you think that mice are cute, and when you think that mice aren't scary, and the gross thing is when you think that mice is scary.

Using the expletive *ah ha* and beginning with the clause, "That's the funny part," Ryan highlighted Olivia's opinion concerning mice. Tying together the idea that she was, "grossed out," which has negative connotations, with the idea that her opinion was humorous, he separated himself from Olivia. He positioned himself as being different and, in one respect, better than her. After Olivia appeared to change her position by

saying that mice are cute, Ryan told her that it was inappropriate to think that having a mouse in a sink was *not* gross. As he made these remarks, Ryan used the pronoun *you* twice to make his argument more personal. His language positioned him as separate from the group, a disruptive element in the session.

Several times during the lesson, Ryan used silly sounding voices, hummed loudly, and made repetitious noises. The sounds and voices that he used, in my experience as an elementary school teacher, are generally considered out of place in a third grade classroom. They were not the sorts of sounds made by the other participants in the group. An example of this type of disruption occurred after Olivia mentioned that her parents thought her pet rabbit, which was black in color, was ugly. Here, Ryan interjected. Saying, “Black black black black ack ack ach ach achh,” he took the word black, broke it down, and drew it out. Later, as the students began discussing the roles that they would be taking in the next session, Ryan repeatedly poked his palm with a pencil saying, “Ow, ow, ow,” claiming that he was testing its sharpness. In each of these cases, Ryan made sounds and used gestures that positioned him as a disruptor rather than as a Story Connector. The other students did not laugh at his behavior, occasionally choosing to ask him to stop instead, suggesting that the behaviors and noises did not endear him to the group.

The other students in the group positioned Ryan in different ways. While Olivia only one corrected Ryan once, saying, “Stop,” after Ryan tapped on the microphone being used to record the session, Alexis and Katherine appeared to ignore his disruptive behaviors. They appeared position Ryan as a member of the group. They included him in

exchanges about the topics introduced in role reports and added to or offered counterproposals to some of the ideas that he forwarded.

Michael, while acting as the Discussion Leader (an identity that did not explicitly call on him to monitor the behavior of others) positioned Ryan as a student that was not appropriately participating in the lesson, as a disruptor. Several times during the session, Michael used language and gestures to express distaste for some of Ryan's behavior. Michael first redirected Ryan during the exchange about the phrase *furry bullet*. Loudly saying, "STOP," he demanded that Ryan not tap on the microphone. Later, as Ryan bounced with his fists in the air, Michael placed his hand firmly on Ryan's shoulder, frowned, and leaned forward. This gesture appeared to be a silent command, one that strongly suggested that Ryan's behavior was out of line with expectations for participants in the group.

Later, Michael reacted as Ryan moved to sit behind him and read over his shoulder. The exchange is reprinted here.

Ryan: Now when she saw I mean uh, I mean the entire thing. Now let me see this, OK? Did you think it was funny when Ms. Franny thought Winn Dixie was a bear? (*reading over Michael's shoulder in a high and nasal voice*)

Michael: You're, you're, you're purposefully talking like that.

Ryan: No I can't even understand what I'm reading (*pronounced in a way that sounded more like writing*).

By beginning his sentence with the word *you're*, Michael set Ryan as the subject of the accusation. Repeating it, he appeared frustrated or unsure of how to proceed.

Purposefully, in this clause, serves as an adverbial adjunct, one that implied negative intent (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). The deictic *that*, which takes the place of a more specific description of Ryan's use of language, follows the word *purposefully* and seems to emphasize the idea that Ryan's speech was unpleasant. Michael's language, in sum, was used to correct Ryan and to contrast his behavior with the kinds of behaviors expected of group participants.

As Ryan enacted an identity as the Story Connector and as the other participants enacted their identities as the Illustrator, Word Wizard, Summarizer, and Discussion Leader in a figured world defined by the role sheets and by their own actions, they participated in a literacy practice that I refer to here as *Circling Around Literature*. This practice is described in the next section.

Literacy Practice: Circling Around Literature. Just as online social networking, as a literacy practice, involves posting photographs, writing micro-blogs, and sending instant messages (Mills, 2010), *Circling Around Literature* included several actions, activities, and ways of talking about texts. Participating in this literacy practice, the students read from, summarized, or displayed their role sheets; shared experiences related to events in the novel and to the content of reports; and participated in exchanges or discussions related to the role reports.

In *Circling Around Literature*, the students presented role reports using the role sheets that they had filled out prior to the session. Reports were predominantly shared orally, though Alexis pressed the participants to look at a drawing that she had made in lieu of talking first about the event that she had chosen to represent. The ideas and concepts introduced as a part of the reports came from within a band of topics delimited

by the directions and lines printed on the sheets. Ryan's Story Connector sheet, for instance, suggested that he make connections between two texts and then write a description of the similarities. Other actions included identifying and defining unfamiliar vocabulary, composing questions about the assigned reading, and illustrating events. *Circling Around Literature* precluded introducing topics including the relationships among characters, major themes, or issues related to the author's craft (among others).

As reports were delivered, students followed a prescribed order defined by the role sheets and Ms. Flores' instructions. Olivia read each of her entries in order and then asked the students to help her define the phrase *furry bullet*. Michael read his first question, allowed for some discussion, and then read his second question. Alexis displayed her illustration, allowed students to guess what she had drawn, and then summarized the event that she had represented. *Circling Around Literature* involved following a specific sequence of action in presenting information written on the role sheets.

Once reports were delivered, students participated in exchanges about the topics that had been introduced. At several points during these exchanges, students made connections between the novel and their own experiences. Ryan connected two characters that were friends in *Because of Winn Dixie* with the two main characters in *Charlotte's Web*. Olivia claimed to have seen mice in her house in Africa just as there had been mice in the church in the focal text. Michael said that he seen a mouse in his sink at home. Connections tended to be at a surface level. The students related literal information in the text to things that they had done or seen. The connections did not appear to lead to, or indicate an understanding of, major themes or ideas in the focal text. While the students

might have discussed issues of, for instance, tolerance, isolation, loss, misfortune, or friendship, participation in the literacy practice did not mean that students had to interact or talk about the texts with these concepts in the foreground. While interacting with the novel, the students tended to point out seemingly incidental similarities. Making surface-level connections constituted another part of participating in the literacy practice.

Participation in *Circling Around Literature* meant talking continuously about a book and about role reports. During and after reports, as a part of this practice, the students added to or disagreed with things that the other students said. Ryan, for example, proposed that it was funny to read about a character falling down after seeing what she thought was a bear. Alexis agreed, but added that she had fallen down because she was confused. During these exchanges, the students frequently asked and answered questions about *Because of Winn Dixie*. Inquiry, it appeared, was an element in *Circling Around Literature*. Some questions, like Michael's question about mice and Olivia's question about the phrase *furry bullet*, were a part of the students' role reports. Others like, "How are mice gross?" were asked in relation to the text or to something that another student had said about the novel, but were not a part of reports. Questions tended to be at a surface or literal level. Asking whether or not mice are gross or if it was surprising to see a mouse in a church, for instance, students called on one another to provide opinions. Their questions did not appear to relate to broader themes or concepts in the novel.

Overall, *Circling Around Literature* involved using a set of worksheets (the role sheets) as the basis for exchanges related to a novel. Participation involved reporting from copies of the role sheets and then talking about what had been said. Participants took part in exchanges about the texts (both the novel and the role sheets) by asking and

answering questions and by adding to or disagreeing with statements made by others. The topics covered in discussions were limited to those covered by the role sheets.

Connections and questions were primarily at a literal level.

Ms. Flores: Year 2

In this section, I describe a session that occurred in Ms. Flores class in Year 2. Meeting in what she referred to as a literature circle, Ms. Flores worked with six students as they read and talked about the book *Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman* (Sterling, 1987). This was the second in a series of literature discussions. Prior to the session, I spoke with Flores concerning the outcomes that she hoped to see from literature circles. She said that she was basing decisions about the conduct of literature circles on what she knew about the skills and strategies that students need to master by the end of third grade and her observations of the students' reading in class. She posited that her students needed to practice reading longer and richer texts (in this case a novel with a historical basis and themes related to perseverance and social justice).

Additionally, Ms. Flores felt that the students needed to speak at greater length about the kinds of issues and topics that concerned them most as they read. During several conversations about reading groups at the end of Year 1, Ms. Flores and I talked about the discussions that resulted from use of the literature circle framework. We agreed that literature circles limited what and how the students could talk about readings during small-group sessions. The literature discussion framework, we thought, would allow students to introduce topics that were more relevant to them at the time of reading. Ms. Flores recognized, in one interview, that she valued student talk. As a student, she had often been corrected for using language that her teachers did not appear to appreciate.

She had become, through years of schooling, self-conscious about her speech. She felt that she needed to honor what students said in order to prevent feelings of alienation and disenfranchisement.

Each literature discussion group met once a week. The group described here met every Wednesday. As the participants talked about the novel, a specific figured world developed, one that is described in the next session.

Figured World: Flores' Literature Discussion. I refer to the figured world surrounding the session as *Flores' Literature Discussion*. It developed around the students' positions within a specific academic category in the school, journals that the students used to record their thinking about the novel they were reading, and the language that the participants used as they interacted during the session. In this section, I describe the general classroom context in order to provide a backdrop for students' participation in literature discussions and then provide a detailed description of several factors that contributed to the development of a specific figured.

Classroom context. Ms. Flores' had not made significant changes to her classroom between Year 1 and Year 2. Students' desks were still arranged in groups in the middle of the room. Students could face each other and talk as they worked at their desks. Large areas of carpet were left open to one side of the room so that the students could work or meet on the floor. While backpacks had been stored on tables and shelves in Year 1, Ms. Flores now had hooks lining the undersides of shelves on which students could hang their belongings. Across from the classroom door, a horseshoe shaped table filled a corner of the room. Sometimes covered with dictionaries, atlases, students' books,

or other reading materials, the horseshoe table was used during some of Ms. Flores' literature discussions.

As I mention in Chapter 3, literature discussions took place in the second half of each reading period. The first half was structured around *The Junior Great Books K-12* program (*JGB*) (The Great Books Foundation, 2014). The program provided students with opportunities to practice writing and discussing questions about texts, encouraged students to engage and challenge one another during discussions, and emphasized the importance of learning and understanding new vocabulary.

As a part of this program, students read and discussed books from the *JGB* collection. Instruction occurred over several phases: a pre-reading discussion, a first reading of a text, a discussion addressing students' questions about the text, a rereading of the same text, a vocabulary discussion, a discussion about a focal question asked by the discussion leader, and a creative writing exercise. A teacher's guide structured each phase and suggested discussion topics, interpretive questions (that may have more than one answer based on evidence found in the text), and writing activities. The guide also suggested a specific sequence for introducing and facilitating discussions and activities. Students, as a part of the program, filled out entries in response journals as they participated in several of the phases. Journals asked students, for instance, to write about a confusing part of a story, write about an unfamiliar idea or concept in the text, or fill out a graphic organizer in order to determine the main idea of a text.

The high group. In Year 2, Ms. Flores' continued to work with students during walk-to-reading sessions that had performed in the top third of the third grade. Teachers again referred to Ms. Flores' class as the *high group* (field notes, Sept., 2012). The

students in the class, though to different degrees and in a variety of ways, identified themselves as high performing students as well.

In interviews conducted during the 2012-2013 school year, I asked students to talk about their reading groups, the reasons for which they felt they were placed in specific classes, and about themselves as readers. Carl, who was a part of the literature discussion described below, implied that he was in a high group, saying, “Like, intelligence.” Jake, another of the students in the group said, “Ms. Flores. In Ms. F.’s, we do high reading, like big books.” Camellia, a student observed during a different session said that she was in Ms. Flores’ class because of her gender and her intelligence. She said, “I think I’m in there because Ms. Flores is a girl and I’m a girl, too. Because they are smart.” Though students described their classrooms in different ways, Ms. Flores’ students tended to think of themselves as *high*.

A position as a *high student* carried with it the assumption that a student was capable of reading more difficult texts and could participate in reading lessons that were different from those of their lower performing peers. As Jake noted later in an interview, in addition to reading, “big books,” students in Ms. Flores class, “have discussions.” Asked to talk about her reading group and reasons for her placement, Camellia added that, “The group has a lot of work and interesting stuff.”

Response journals. At the beginning of the first literature discussion recorded in Ms. Flores’ classroom in Year 2, the first in the series of discussions for this reading group, Ms. Flores gave each student a booklet made from several sheets of blank paper that had been folded in half and stapled. The first page of these response journals was printed with four lines.

The response journals shaped the figured world in some important ways. Unlike the literature circle role sheets described in the previous section, the journals did not explicitly delimit the kinds of responses that students should make. The journals themselves did not describe or suggest the content of student responses. Pages were not titled, directions for recording responses were not printed in the booklets, and the booklet was not printed with lines that might have suggested that students give a specific number of responses or that they should write responses of a certain length. The journals appeared to allow for a broad range of responses. Students could react to readings by writing or drawing without having to complete closed ended assignments.

Acting as a group. Ms. Flores' directions for participating in literature discussions helped to further shape the figured world. These directions were given during the first session. Contrasting literature discussions with literature circles, she gave the following instructions.

I know that some of you have been in a Lit Circle before... We're gonna do a little bit different... So this time around, it's kinda, we all have the same job. And we all are gonna come together, and we're gonna have a, a really good discussion. It's kind of like, when you read a book by yourself and you're just, like, "Oh, man. I wish I could tell someone. Like, all of this is so exciting." Like, "Oh, my gosh. I can't believe—." This is a, an opportunity for you to come together and talk about what's happening in the book. It's like you're watching a movie and you're talking about it.

By saying twice that the students were going to, "come together," that they were going to talk and have discussions during in-class sessions, and by comparing discussions to

informal conversations about books and movies outside of the classroom, Ms. Flores worked to shape a figured world in which the participants were expected to address one another as they talked about the focal text. Repeatedly using the word *gonna*, she suggested that the students would be engaging in this type of conversation regularly and that it was an expected behavior.

Language used later in the session suggested that the students had taken up positions as group members. In one exchange, for instance, Ms. Flores and the students discussed what should be written at the top of the response journals. They used different words to describe themselves. Hunter, asking Ms. Flores to clarify her directions, said, “So we put at the top the *members*?” Michael added to the exchange, saying simply, “Team.” Using the words *members* and *team* the participants suggested that they accepted positions as parts of a unit rather than as individual and independently working students.

Within this setting, all of the participants used an informal vernacular and non-academic or informal vocabulary, signaling that they shared common body of knowledge and that they were working together as a group (Gee, 2005). Jessica, for instance, used informal language to talk about an unfamiliar vocabulary word that another student had introduced. Saying, “Yeah. That was mine, too,” she used the word *that* in place of the word *clutching* and chose the less formal *yeah* over more formal alternatives. Later, she chose *dad* over *father* and *vocabs* over *vocabulary*. Similarly, Carl abbreviated words, replaced nouns with pronouns, and omitted words. Stating an opinion about a character’s feelings, he said, “Um, I think that she was angry, the first time and was thinkin’ about, other people.”

Elements of the classroom environment, including the language used by the participants, the students' response journals, and the students' position as *high* helped to define a specific figured world. As a narrative or storyline delimiting what could be considered normal or appropriate during the session, this figured world was associated with the participants' performance of identities and their participation in a specific literacy practice.

Participant identities. Ms. Flores, during the session described below, performed an identity as a non-interpretive authority. Hunter, one of the third grade students, performed an identity as an expert participant while Alexis and Michael enacted identities as literature discussants. Carl and Jessica acted as literature discussants as well, but layered their identities with elements of identities as comedians. Jake enacted an identity as a silent student. These identities are explained and illustrated in this section. I also discuss some of the ways in which the participants positioned one another during the session.

Ms. Flores: Non-interpretive authority. During the session described here, Ms. Flores occupied the seat immediately behind the horseshoe table in the u-shaped cutout. Hunter, Alexis, and Jake each took chairs facing Ms. Flores while Carl, Michael, and Jessica knelt side-by-side at the edge of the table. Though they were permitted to claim chairs from other parts of the room for literature discussions, these students had opted to go without. Ms. Flores did not mention their options or their seating choice during this session. This suggested that students were permitted to seat themselves as they felt comfortable.

As soon as the students settled themselves around the table, Ms. Flores asked the students to remind her of where they had left off in their reading. She then asked for a volunteer to start the discussion. Carl reminded her that they had read a chapter called “Peck of Trouble” and Hunter indicated that he had a question to ask the group. Referring to a pair of dreams that Harriet Tubman had experienced in the chapter, Hunter asked, “Why were her dreams different?” He added that she had dreamed about angry white faces on one page and about escaping on another. Alexis attempted to answer the question.

Alexis: Um, the dream come before she (*Harriet Tubman*) knew she was gonna escape. And then maybe she done thought that she was goin' and then after a while she...

Ms. Flores: She started dreaming, so, the first dream was that, sh- she was escaping. And the second one's the, white, angry...

Hunter: Faces.

Ms. Flores: Faces. So you think she was discouraged. Or, okay. What do you guys think?

Carl: Um, I think that she was angry the first time and was thinkin' about other people.

Ms. Flores: And why do you think she was angry?

Carl: ‘Cause the way the white people did with the slaves, is that they used them for, for easy and hard, and they wouldn't even do it themselves.

Ms. Flores: Okay. What do you guys think?

According to Chinn, Anderson, & Waggoner (2001), teachers act, in varying degrees, as interpretive authorities. Some teachers, as strong interpretive authorities, only accept answers that they consider correct. Others allow students to determine the acceptability of statements. Using the words *okay* and *alright*, Ms. Flores accepted all student contributions, acting as a non-interpretive authority. She appeared to use these words in order to accept student responses and in order to encourage students to continue talking during the discussion. Using the word a total of 51 times, she often used the word before calling on a student to talk or at the end of a conversational turn. At times, the word was used in the same clause as the phrase *all right*. In the snippet above, Ms. Flores used the word in the middle of a turn to accept Hunter's contribution to the discussion. She used the word again immediately after Carl gave his opinion about the topic. By adding *okay* instead of telling Carl that he was right about the dream, she also allowed for prolonged conversation.

Though she did not evaluate student responses, Ms. Flores frequently asked students questions in order to guide the flow of the conversation and to encourage students to participate in the discussion. Out of 134 turns, she asked questions 83 times. By asking these questions, she took predominantly *demanding* speech roles that positioned the students as respondents and providers of information and services (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). She implicitly asserted that the students should continue to talk with one another about topics that had been introduced.

Most frequently, Ms. Flores asked variations of the open-ended question, "What do you think?" In the snippet above, for instance, she used the question twice as she asked the other students at the table to contribute their thoughts to the discussion. Unlike

closed-ended questions, which require yes or no answers or that demand the recitation of information that has already been taught, open-ended questions require students to explore or examine topics of discussion (Nystrand, 2006). Asking, “What do you guys think?” 14 times and similar questions including, “Well, what do you think, what was your answer?” four times, Ms. Flores positioned the students as informed participants, students capable of making meaning through conversation.

Acting in an authoritative position, Ms. Flores asked some questions that functioned as commands. Shortly after Hunter introduced the idea discussed in the snippet above, for instance, she used a question to give directions. She said, “Do you wanna read a question and then, that way you can refer back to that?” Here, she used language that sounded as though she meant to give Hunter a choice, but suggested that he should comply. Asking a question, she appeared to hedge in order to draw the students together as a part of the discussion.

Shortly after the exchange reprinted above, Ms. Flores interrupted Hunter as he started reading an answer he had written in his journal. Posing a command as a question and hedging again, she said, “Well, before we give the answer (*clears throat*) why don't we hear some friends, and then we'll hear your—what you thought?” Here, Ms. Flores added, *why don't* as a way of suggesting an action. She again implied that Hunter had a choice. Adding the pronoun *we*, she proposed that he and Ms. Flores were together in listening to the other participants. By referring to the students as *friends*, she forwarded the idea that the group enjoyed a collegial relationship. Though giving commands, Ms. Flores appeared to use language to bring the group together in conversation around the

central text. At the same time, she positioned the students as capable of providing sufficient answers, as informed participants.

The students: Literature discussants, experts, and comic relief. As the students took their places at the table, Hunter seated himself almost directly across from Ms. Flores. With his copy of the novel, his pencil, and his response journal in front of him, Hunter sat up straight in his chair with his forearms resting on the table. He flattened out his response journal and opened the discussion by asking the first question, the question that Alexis and Carl answered in the snippet above. He said,

So, um, I found a question, on page—uh, on t—two different pages. And the question was, why were her (*Harriet Tubman's*) dreams different. Uh, cuz on one page her dream was, uh, angry, white faces, and the other one, she was escaping. Over the course of the session, Hunter took more conversational turns than any of the other students. While he took 72 turns, Carl took 61, Jessica took 35, Alexis took nine, and Jake took only three. In addition to taking more turns, Hunter introduced more topics for discussion than the other participants. Carl, Michael, and Jessica, each introduced one topic and Alexis suggested two. Hunter introduced four topics over the course of the session. Through repeated turn taking and the introduction of topics, Hunter signaled that he was a knowledgeable student, an expert participant.

Alexis, as the first student to respond to Hunter's question, took a giving speech role. She provided information in response to Hunter's question and to Ms. Flores' request for participation. Though she began by making a statement, she added the word *maybe* as a hedge that allowed others to participate in the discussion. Taking a turn shortly after Alexis, Carl offered an answer to Hunter's question as well. Like Alexis, he

added to the discussion. Using the words *I think*, he too hedged in order to accommodate for the thinking of the other students. In taking these speech actions, both students acted as literature discussants, compliant students participating in the literature discussion in alignment with expectations set by Ms. Flores and the other students.

Throughout the session, Alexis used gestures that signaled that she was participating in the literature discussion and that she was interested in the comments made by each of the other participants. She sat with her forearms resting on the horseshoe table. She leaned forward and looked toward each of the participants as they spoke. Each time a page number was mentioned or when a reference was made to a particular passage in the text, she leafed through the pages in the novel. She periodically picked up her pencil and flipped through her response journal. She occasionally made notes as she listened. By directing her gaze toward speakers, attending to page numbers mentioned, and writing her thoughts in her response journal, Alexis positioned herself as an interested participant, someone engaged in the discussion. She acted as a literature discussant. At the same time, she positioned the other students as discussants, valuing their contributions through her attention and focus.

Asked if he had ever had recurring dreams like Harriet Tubman, Michael was next to add to the discussion. He posited that, “Actually, I—it's like a destiny, when I—like, whenever I remember what I dreamed, it somehow comes true. It's like weird.” Frequently using the filler *like* and an informal vernacular (substituting pronouns for more specific nouns and informal words like *weird*) while adding to the discussion, Michael used language that was inviting and collegial. Within the same sentence, Michael used the word *actually*, an adverb from a more formal register. *Actually* is

generally used as a counterproposal, as a way of contradicting something that has been said or demonstrated (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). In the context of Michael's statement, however, the word indicated that the group should listen and respond. Here, he positioned himself as a group member while adding to the discussion.

After Alexis, Carl, and Michael had offered answers to Hunter's opening question, Hunter introduced a second topic. He said, "And my vocabulary is *palettes* (which he pronounced *pay-lets*) at, page, 18." Making this statement, he used the word *vocabulary*, which Ms. Flores had used during the first session in the series as she gave instructions for participating in literature circles. She had said, "Another thing is, uh, vocabulary words. Just, as we're reading, sometimes, we come across words that we don't know." After a brief exchange about the meaning of the word *palettes*, Hunter introduced a third topic saying, "The connection was when I camp, (*I*) collect firewood for our campfire." Saying that he had a *connection*, Hunter again used a word that Ms. Flores had used in a previous session. Using some of the terms that Ms. Flores had used as she talked about participating in literature discussions, Hunter positioned himself as an expert by signaling a connection to the classroom and an understanding the vocabulary that was a part of Ms. Flores' literature circles.

Alexis was next to introduce a topic for discussion. She said, "Uh, I had a question on 20 and I also had one on 21. And, and it's about that, does muskrat taste good? (*falling intonation*)" Similar to Hunter, Alexis provided the page numbers on which information about her topic could be found and read from her response journal. The contribution, a question about the focal text and a page number, situated her in

alignment with Hunter and with expectations Ms. Flores had set in the previous session. She performed an identity as a literature discussant.

In response to her question, Carl and Jessica spoke up.

Ms. Flores: What do you guys think?

Carl: I think I lost my appetite for lunch.

Ms. Flores: Jessica. (*rising intonation*)

Jessica: I lost my appetite for lunch.

Ms. Flores: You did? [*Laughter*]

Jessica: Yeah. I don't think I'm gonna eat lunch today.

Ms. Flores: Okay.

Ms. Flores: What do you guys think? Do you think—

Michael: I think I'm gonna throw up.

Ms. Flores: Even though we— you know, we prob'ly—we don't — we just by hearin' what it, is that we don't wanna eat it.

Jessica: Maybe it's good for cannibals.

Carl: Uh huh.

Shaking her head, smiling, and looking at Ms. Flores, Jessica followed Carl's lead as he expressed disgust at thought of eating a muskrat. When Ms. Flores asked Jessica why she thought muskrat was good for cannibals, Jessica added, "Well, I watched this thing on Netflix about cannibals." Breaking from the topic (reasons for eating muskrat), Carl and Jessica introduced humor into the discussion and disrupted the flow of the conversation. They enacted identities as comedians or comic relief. Using clauses like *lost my appetite* and words like *cannibals*, the pair applied a social language associated (in my experience

as a classroom teacher) with humor. Laughing, Ms. Flores acknowledged their use of humor as Michael grimaced and added to the discussion by saying that he was going to vomit. Ms. Flores and Michael appeared to accept the departure from serious discussion and the comic relief offered by Jessica and Carl. Their use of language and humor strengthened connections between the participants.

Ms. Flores closed the discussion about muskrat meat by asking if the group had any other questions. She then called on Carl to ask a question. Carl flipped open his book, pointed to a line with his pencil, and said, “‘Cause I don’t—the *clutching* word, I don’t know what it means.” He gave the students a page and line reference, and then looked over at Hunter. Hunter read, “Clutching the patchwork.” After Ms. Flores clarified the topic, Hunter said that he thought that *clutching* meant *holding*. Carl proposed an alternative meaning, saying, “And fixing too. And also fixing does too.” Shortly after saying this he added, “‘Cause it—it has a patchwork, so it must be like holding or fixing.” Like Alexis and Hunter, Carl proposed that the group talk about a particular topic, offered information about the topic, and presented ideas in response to demands for information. Repeating that the word *clutching* meant *fixing*, he sought approval for his contribution from the group. He acted as a literature discussant, a compliant student participating in a literature discussion.

Alexis raised her hand as the discussion about the word *clutching* drew to a close. She said, “What is restless on page 20 (*rising intonation*)? I didn’t figure it out and I didn’t have time to look it up.” Jessica, who had been kneeling against the table and flipping the pages of her book asked, “Wait, restless?” She then turned to the page that Alexis had cited and scanned the text. Ms. Flores asked where she could find the word

and Jessica responded. Resting the spine of the book on the table and peering at the page. She said that the word could be found, “on the last one it's the last paragraph.” After a few turns, she proposed that, “It might mean, uh, fragrance.” Responding both verbally and non-verbally to demands for information and action and signaling that she was curious about the meaning of the word, she contributed to the exchange as a literature discussant. Using the word *might*, she opened discussion to the group rather than telling the students the meaning of the word and potentially ending the exchange. While enacting this identity, she positioned the other students as discussants as well by inviting them in to the conversation.

Michael was last to propose a topic for discussion. He said, “Actually, um, I didn't really understand how she kept getting the same dreams just to tell her how to get out.” Asked to repeat the question, he said, “Um, I didn't understand how she could continuously dream about more ideas of how to get out and escape.” Revisiting a subject that had been discussed at the beginning of the session, Michael demonstrated that he was invested in the finding answers to questions that had been asked by the group. Again using a more formal sounding word, *actually*, he called on the group to listen. Using the word *continuously*, another word from a more formal vernacular, Michael shaded his position as a literature discussant with that of an expert.

As in the previous year, the students were encouraged to determine reading assignments to be completed between sessions. Assignments were generally established at the ends of sessions. Hunter, nearing end of this session, proposed that the group read through half of a chapter of the central text. After some discussion about which chapters had been read, Ms. Flores confirmed that the students would read the chapter titled

“School Days.” Unlike Hunter, Michael asserted that the group would read until they reached the beginning of the next chapter, “The Train Whistle Blows.” This extended the reading assignment by twelve pages. Using a falling intonation to suggest that he was confident about what he was saying and following Ms. Flores’ turn, Michael strengthened his proposition. Here, he acted both a literature discussant and an expert. Asserting that the students could read a longer assignment, he positioned the students as proficient readers.

As the session drew to a close, Ms. Flores noted that several of the students had not written much in their response journals. She said, “Okay, boys and girls next time, I, you need to — ‘cause a lot of you are not writing questions, and you’re not bringing back the vocab.” Hunter interrupted her as she spoke. His statements are reprinted below.

Brackets indicate overlapping speech.

Hunter: [I brought everything]

Ms. Flores: You bring the vocab, but you’re not writing the definition.

[You need to be prepared for our meeting.]

Hunter: [I brought everything I needed]

Here, Hunter repeated that he was prepared for the session and that he had brought all of the materials that he had been told to bring. In doing so, he reinforced his position as an expert participant. Simultaneously, he contrasted himself with the other students. Using *I* as the subject of clauses rather than a more inclusive *we*, he positioned himself as different. The other students, he suggested, had not done the work as he had.

Jake: Silent student. Jake, during the literature discussion, took only three conversational turns. Two of his turns were taken during the exchanges about muskrat

meat. When Ms. Flores asked him to state an opinion, he replied, “Mmm I don't know what muskrats are,” After Hunter told him that it was like a rat, he said, “I have never tried it.” Saying that he didn't know what a muskrat was and by saying that he had *never* tried it, an absolute in terms of temporal polarity (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004), he positioned himself as being unable to speak to the topic. In his last conversational turn, he responded after Ms. Flores asked him if he had a question to share. He said, “I didn't get to write any down.” Using the words *didn't get to*, he suggested that conditions had prevented him from writing. Rather than positioning himself as resistant or culpable, he set himself up as a not being able to participate. Though he did not talk during the lesson, Jake sat up straight in his chair, made eye contact with the other participants, and periodically looked at the instructional materials that he had been asked to use during the lesson. Signaling attentiveness but abstaining from the use of verbal language, he enacted an identity as a silent student.

Hall (2007) found similar instances of silent identities in language arts classrooms in a middle school. Finding that silence, as an identity tool, can be used for a variety of purposes in the classroom, she points out that it can also have an impact on reading comprehension and information retention. In this literature discussion, Jake's performance of a silent identity implicitly positioned the other students as actors. Like radio silence or a one-sided phone call, Jake's wordless participation suggested that others should speak. In each of the exchanges in which Jake spoke, Hunter did just that. After Jake said he didn't know what muskrats were, Hunter described them. When Jake said he hadn't eaten muskrat, Hunter said that, “I think they're pretty, I think they're pretty good.” He filled in after each of Jake's statements. Because Jake did not take

action in a figured world that called on students to participate in specific ways, Hunter and the other students were left to act.

The student in this group enacted several different identities as they interacted in a particular figured world, a literature discussion. While Jake performed an identity as a silent student, Hunter acted as an informed expert. Carl, Alexis, Jessica, and Michael each took on identities as literature discussants, though some of them layered or colored their identities at times with identities as comedians and experts. Enacting these identities in this figured world, the students participated in the literacy practice described in the next section.

Literacy practice: Book Talk. The students described above participated in a literacy practice that I call a *Book Talk*. As a way of engaging with texts, *Book Talk* involved interacting in an open discussion around student produced journal entries and an assigned novel. Both texts were revisited and made a part of conversation throughout the session.

Prior to the session, each student made entries in blank response journals. The subjects of entries varied, but all revolved around a focal text. The students used this journal as the basis discussions. Several of the students read directly from their journals as they proposed topics for discussion while others paraphrased what they had written. Accessing entries in journals appeared to be a part of engaging in a *Book Talk*. Open in format as they were, allowing for variety in content and style, the journals implicitly sanctioned discussions about a range of topics. While Alexis asked about muskrat consumption, Hunter inquired about the meaning of the word *palette*, and Michael submitted that the group talk again about why Harriet Tubman had a recurring dream.

Discussion around the focal text was also central in participating in *Book Talk*. Ms. Flores continuously urged the students to continue talking, in part by regularly asking questions of the group including, “What do you think.” The students responded by engaging in lengthy periods of open discussion, relatively unrestricted intervals in which information is shared and received (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, and Gamoran, 2003). Some of these exchanges lasted for as long as two or three minutes.

As a part of participating in *Book Talk*, the students regularly referenced the text during the discussion. After Alexis, for example, asked about the taste of muskrat meat, Hunter revisited a passage in the novel in order to support the idea that muskrat tasted good. He said,

’Cause, uh, the big, the people in the big house want to - have it, so I think it’s gonna be pretty good...because they (*the people in the big house*), um, they would, um, ‘cause it (*the focal text*), said that they whip them (*slaves*) if they ate one muskrat.

Working through the meaning of the word *clutching* later in the session, Carl and Hunter both referenced a specific paragraph in the assigned chapter in order to make the point that clutching meant holding. Likewise, Michael referenced a passage in order to say that Harriet Tubman’s dreams indicated that escape was her destiny.

In sum, engaging in *Book Talk* involved using student produced writing as the basis for discussion around a central text. As students talked, they asked and answered questions about unfamiliar vocabulary and other things that they had noticed while reading. Questions and connections of varying depth and relation to the ideas central to the development of the novel could be asked. As students participated, they revisited the

focal text in order to support their arguments. All students were expected to participate in the discussion.

In the previous sections, I discuss figured worlds, identities, and literacy practices that occurred in classrooms where students were considered *high*. In the next section, I discuss a small-group lesson that took place in a classroom where students were positioned as being *low*. Identities and the figured world were again related to participation in a specific literacy practice.

Ms. Wilson: Year 2

In the following section I discuss the results of an analysis of data collected in Ms. Wilson's 4th and 5th grade classroom in Year 2. During this session, Ms. Wilson met with three students in an effort to help them learn to use a specific set of skills and strategies. Having observed the students as they read in her classroom, Ms. Wilson had determined that the students needed to learn to extract and organize information from expository texts. A specific figured world developed as she and the three students interacted.

The figured world: Small-group lesson. The figured world observed during the session involved participation in a teacher-led lesson and the completion of a worksheet. It was framed, in large part, by the students' placement in a particular academic category, the students' seating arrangement, the graphic organizer that the students were supposed to fill out, and the language that the students and teacher used as they participated in the lesson. I refer to this figured world as a *Small-Group Lesson*.

The low group. In Year 2, Ms. Wilson taught a group of students that had been assigned to her according to their performance on the Galileo K-12 Online© (Assessment Technology, Inc., 2002-2012) pre-assessment and their work in the classroom. Ms.

Wilson's students had performed below grade level expectations according to classroom and school level assessments. Though the teachers privately referred to Ms. Wilson's walk-to-reading class as the *low group* (field notes, Dec. 25, 2011) they generally and publicly referred to her class as *Group A* (student interview, 2013, personal communication, 2013).

Though interviews conducted in Year 2 suggest that students in Ms. Wilson's class identified and described themselves in different ways, many talked about levels of support that they received or their levels of academic performance. One student said only that she was in, "Group A." Another said that he was in group A and added that, "A is to help you more." When asked why they had been placed in a particular classroom, several of Ms. Wilson's students answered that they were somehow deficient in reading.

Angelica, a student that participated in the reading lesson described below, said that she had been assigned to Ms. Wilson's class, "'Cause I think that I, like it's the low class. Some people from last year, some teachers said that some students were lower and now they're in this class." Thomas, who had been in Ms. Flores' class in Year 1 but had been assigned to Ms. Wilson's class in fourth grade, answered that, "I have not got in to a meets," meaning that he had not met grade level standards according to the Galileo assessment. Another student said that she needed help in reading.

Grouping and the differences between groups were topics of conversation in the hallway between classes during Year 2. According to Ms. Wilson (personal communication, 2013), students in groups D and E had been observed arguing loudly about which of their classes had been designated for higher performing students. The fourth and fifth grade teachers held class meetings in an effort to quell the arguments.

Differences between groups were mentioned by some of Ms. Wilson's students during interviews as well. Thomas, when asked which group he was in, said,

Like group B has a higher reading level than us group A have. So we were put in different groups. We were sorted out by reading level. We just assumed that they started doing that because we have some trouble reading. A lot of group B, C, and D people don't have as much trouble reading and they are always reading things like chapter books. And group A has more problems and we all read small books like the Gingerbread Man and Sponge Bob.

Placed in reading groups according to their academic performance. Ms. Wilson's students were positioned as *low*. They were differentiated from the other students in the grade level and given a specific designation. This designation, group A, suggested that they were members of a stable group.

Seating arrangement. In Year 2, Ms. Wilson conducted most of her small-group lessons in a carpeted area on her linoleum floor in a corner of her classroom. During the lesson described below, she sat near the edge of the carpet with her back to the classroom library. Each of the student participants in the session, Elijah, Angelica, and Patrick, arranged themselves on the floor as well.

Taking place on the floor rather than at a desk or table, Ms. Wilson's reading group took on an informal feel. The teacher was not positioned as the focal point of the lesson as she might have been had the session been held, for instance, at a horseshoe table. Unlike in more formal seating arrangements, the participants did not have set positions in relation to the other members of the group. They could move about on the carpet in order to make themselves comfortable or to reposition themselves in relation to

the other participants. They did this throughout the lesson, occasionally moving to other spots on the floor, sitting up to look at one another, and lying down on their stomachs.

Ms. Wilson, in an interview recorded after the small-group lesson, said that she allowed students to arrange themselves on the floor in order to make it easier for them to complete their work.

'Cause like with the clipboard on their laps, it's always awkward 'cause they're like writing, so they always end up asking like, "Can I just lay on the floor and do it?" And they still do their work... Like, I don't mind. Like I always do my work at home on the floor, like I just sit on the ground. It's like my preference.


Comparing her needs to the needs of the other participants, Ms. Wilson stressed that students were permitted to position themselves in any way that might expedite the completion of work. The students' ability to make decisions about how and where to sit in relation to the teacher helped to create a figured world that positioned the teacher as an understanding or sympathetic authority figure.

A graphic organizer. Ms. Wilson had planned, during this session, to teach students to gather and organize information. As a part of the session, Ms. Wilson distributed a worksheet copied from a book entitled *Short Reading Passages & Graphic Organizers to Build Comprehension: Grades 4-5* (Beech, 2001). She had found the book online while searching for materials for teaching students to read informational texts. She reasoned that the pages would provide students with readings that were manageable in length and that could be used as a resource for finding factual information (Personal communication, 2013).

The worksheet that she used during this session served as the focal text during the session. The sheet was printed with specific instructions for completing an activity and with spaces for entering responses. The sheet is reproduced below.


Figure 3. Fine Fingerprints: A Graphic Organizer Worksheet.

Name _____ Date _____




Fine Fingerprints


Do you know how your fingerprints are like your signature? Both tell who you are. Although each person's fingerprints are unique, fingerprints fall into four main types. Whorl fingerprints look like circles within circles. The ridges on Arch fingerprints look like gentle hills. Tented Arch prints look like very steep hills. The fourth type of fingerprint is known as the Loop. The lines in this type of fingerprint curve around and form patterns that resemble loops.




Arch



Loop



Tented Arch



Whorl

Look at the topic in the web. Find details from the paragraph that tell about the topic. Write them in the web. One detail is given.

detail →

Arch:
like gentle
hills

↓ topic

Types of
Fingerprints

MORE! Find out what types of fingerprints you and your classmates have.

7

Figure 3. Fine Fingerprints. From *Short Passages With Graphic Organizers to Model & Teach Key Comprehension Skills: Grades 4-5* by L. W. Beech, 2010, p. 7. Copyright by Linda Ward Beech, Scholastic Teaching Resources.

In the middle of the page, below the informational paragraph, the worksheet gave explicit instructions for use. Reading, “Look at the topic in the web. Find the details from the paragraph that tell about the topic. Write them in the web. One detail is given,” the worksheet suggested that the students should act as respondents, students with a task to complete. They were charged with reading the focal text, looking for information

concerning the four major types of fingerprints, and writing the information that they found in the circles at the bottom of the page. Three empty circles accompanying a circle containing detail from the informational paragraph intimated that students should make entries in the graphic organizer.

Given an example of an entry, the heading, “Arch: like gentle hills,” the text on the worksheet suggested that entries should be brief, written as an incomplete sentence, and relate to the topic of the informational text. The text acted as a closed-ended request for information, requiring a response of a particular type and length. As a part of the figured world, the text suggested that students should follow a set of directions and respond to prompts for information. The text positioned the students as workers tasked with reading and filling in fields.

A format for responding. In many classrooms, teachers and students participate in exchanges in which the teacher asks a question, students answer the question, and the teacher evaluates the students’ responses (Mehan, 1978; Williams, 2014). Referred to as IRE (initiate, respond or reply, and evaluate), this pattern was a part of the figured world that defined expected behavior during the session.

Though not observable during every exchange, Ms. Wilson and the students often followed an IRE turn-taking pattern. In the following exchange, for instance, Ms. Wilson and Elijah talked about the information on the worksheet.

Ms. Wilson *(quietly and aside to Elijah)* Is there an answer that it’s telling us anywhere. *(Initiation)*

Elijah It only says that loops have a ring like look that curve into different shapes and patterns. *(Response)*

Ms. Wilson You took notes on the different shapes and patterns right?
 Okay, Awesome, so, make sure you're writing that.

(Evaluation)

In another exchange, Ms. Wilson asked the group about what they had learned from the informational paragraph.

Ms. Wilson: What's the main topic? *(Initiation)*

Angelica: It's about um, different fingerprints. *(Response)*

Ms. Wilson: All right, so we know it's about fingerprints. *(Evaluation)*

In each case, an IRE model is evident. Occurring regularly throughout the session, the model appeared to be a part of the storyline, a type of exchange that the teacher and the students could expect during the session.

The worksheet, the seating arrangement, the question-answer response format, and the school's positioning of the students as *low* (all figures in shaping the figured world) suggested that the students should act and talk in certain ways. These factors helped to create a specific narrative through which the participants were expected to move. The figured world was related to enactments of identities and the literacy practice (what the participants were doing with literacy) described in the next sections.

Participant identities. During this session, Ms. Wilson enacted an identity as a caring instructor. The students, Angelica, Patrick, and Elijah, each enacted identities as compliant workers, though in subtly different ways. The identities enacted by the participants and some of the ways in which they appeared to position one another are described in this section.

Ms. Wilson: Caring instructor. Ms. Wilson’s classroom was situated in a hallway adjacent to the Kindergarten and first grade rooms. In order to get to her classroom, her students needed to walk away from the fourth and fifth grade hallways and cross a large atrium. Her room was brightly lit, with a bank of windows set high in the wall allowing for a view of the nearby city’s skyline.

Desks and chairs consumed much of the room. Ms. Wilson’s desk, which was covered with notes on student observations, workbooks, cups of pencils, and other teaching tools, took up a position just inside the classroom door. Individual student desks had been arranged groups of six or seven to create larger tables or islands. Students faced one another when they sat at their desks. An empty horseshoe-shaped table occupied the corner opposite the classroom door. In an empty space roughly 12 feet by 15 feet, Ms. Wilson had placed a large, thin, blue acrylic floor carpet. It was in this space that the Ms. Wilson met with reading groups.

Ms. Wilson opened the session by sitting down on the carpet and crossing her legs. Pencil in hand and a clipboard at her feet, she told the students the purpose of the session.

Ms. Wilson: We are going to be looking at graphic organizers as a way or organizing main ideas and details in a non-fiction text. So—

Elijah: What is the fingerprints for?

Ms. Wilson: Well, why don't we look at the top (*falling intonation*)? The title of what we are going to be reading is called “Fine Fingerprints.” So we are going to be reading a little non-fiction text about fingerprints and we're going to be talking about what the main idea

and the details are within this text, what the topic is and what the details are. And then we're gonna look at our fingerprints, too.

Acting as an instructor, a person responsible for imparting knowledge, Ms. Wilson introduced the students to the text and previewed the session. Within this identity, she spoke more frequently and at greater length during the session than the other participants. While Elijah took 18 conversational turns and Angelica and Patrick each took 21, Ms. Wilson took a total of 74 turns. During 37 of her turns, she spoke using more than three clauses within a single turn. An example of one of her turns is printed above. Speaking frequently and at length, Ms. Wilson positioned herself as an instructor, a person charged with speaking rather than listening. In taking up this position, she positioned the students in complimentary identities as listeners.

During this introduction, and in fact throughout the session, Ms. Wilson took *giving* speech roles. She frequently provided students with information. In *the snippet above*, for instance, Ms. Wilson can be seen taking a *giving* speech role, telling the students that they would be reading a text entitled *Fine Fingerprints*. In a string of declarative clauses, she told them that the piece provided information about fingerprints. She went on to say that the students would be tasked with identifying the main idea of the piece and that they would be examining their own fingerprints.

The students did not always answer Ms. Wilson's questions before a few seconds had lapsed. Periodically, Ms. Wilson waited for long periods of time before receiving responses from the students or encouraging students to talk. Her delay in responding positioned her as a person that valued student contributions, as a caring instructor. It is recommended that teachers pause for about three seconds after asking questions of

students during instruction (Stahl, 1994). Commonly referred to as wait time (Wasik & Iannone-Campbell, 2012, Stichter, Stormont, & Lewis, 2008) this interval is intended to allow students to think, answer questions, or submit to demands. Ms. Wilson's regularly waited for more than ten seconds before repeating questions or before asking another student to speak.

After asking Angelica, "Did you know anything about fingerprints?" Ms. Wilson waited for one minute and 15 seconds before asking a follow up question. She reinforced the value of Angelica's contribution by telling another student that he was not permitted to respond for her. When Patrick asked if he could tell, "everything we know," she responded by saying, "*(smiling and laughing)* You can't tell me what she knows, what she knows is in her brain *(falling intonation)*." In a declarative clause marked with the word *can't*, she told Patrick that he was not permitted to answer. Repeating, "what she knows," and adding the overly specific phrase, "in her brain," she suggested that the idea was somewhat absurd. Ms. Wilson worked to ensure that Angelica's voice could be heard and that she was allowed to speak for herself. She gave value to Angelica's contributions.

Following the series of exchanges concerning the students' prior knowledge, Ms. Wilson began talking with the students about the information printed on the worksheet. During this portion of the session (and at a couple of other points nearer to the end of the lesson) Ms. Wilson spoke on behalf of the students. She added information that was absent from students' responses. In the following exchange, for instance, she added to a comment that Elijah made concerning the captions under illustrations of the different types of fingerprints.

Ms. Wilson: So these were the four types of fingerprints they talked about, that I wasn't sure, when I was reading, what they were. So—

Elijah: Look at them.

Ms. Wilson: Yes, Elijah just pointed out, hey look, they're right here. Those same words are over here. So guys, we need to remember we need to always look for clues in the pictures for non-fiction text.

Though Elijah had said only, "Look at them," Ms. Wilson asserted that Elijah had *pointed out* that the captions on the worksheet contained the words in the informational paragraph. She added the exclamation *hey* to alert the students to the importance of her statement and then repeated that the captions mirrored the body of the text. She called attention to specific qualities of the worksheet. Her speech positioned her as an instructor, someone imparting knowledge. She gave instruction pertaining to the nature of fingerprints. In doing so, she positioned the students as listeners, people responsible for hearing and taking in information.

After talking for some time about fingerprints, Ms. Wilson prompted the students to read the informational paragraph with her. At this point, and in several other instances, Ms. Wilson stopped to correct a student. As the group read chorally, Angelica began using a small square of paper to track the text as Ms. Wilson read it to the group. She began drawing on it as soon as Ms. Wilson finished reading. Pursing her lips, Ms. Wilson reached over and gently plucked the paper off of Angelica's clipboard. She smiled and tipped her head to one side as Angelica looked up at her. The episode was brief and wordless. Smiling and moving slowly, Ms. Wilson signaled a correction, but one of a gentle nature. Appearing to recognize the correction, Angelica gave Ms. Wilson a toothy

grin and returned her attention to the text. Her correction, gentle and friendly in its delivery, signaled that Ms. Wilson was caring. At the same time, the correction positioned her as the authority, the person in charge of actions and activities during the session.

As the session progressed, and as the group began to read and write about fingerprints independently, Ms. Wilson continued to take *demanding* speech roles. She used questioning (in addition to seeking information) in order to suggest that students should participate in the instructional session in specific ways. As the students were writing on their worksheets, for instance, Ms. Wilson noticed that Patrick had been copying from the focal text verbatim as he filled in the graphic organizer. She used questions to suggest that he should be summarizing the text.

Ms. Wilson: Do you wanna copy every single word here?

Patrick: Yes.

Ms. Wilson: Why? Why do you say that?

Patrick: Like it make a better like, so it can be kind of like the same thing
(*rising intonation*).

Ms. Wilson: Why do you want your work to be the same as what's written
(*rising intonation*).

Elijah: I'm done.

Ms. Wilson: Hold on one second. Patrick, do you want your work to be the same as what's already written?

Patrick: No.

Ms. Wilson: No, you want what's in your brain, right? This graphic organizer's supposed to make it simpler for us. So we have our main ideas and some details.

Repeating the question in three different ways, Ms. Wilson intimated that Patrick had not given the proper response. Using a rising intonation, she suggested that he was wrong to think that copying the text was appropriate. Ending the series of turns with the word *right*, she sought his consent. Patrick appeared to understand her suggestion and changed his answer. Following his acceptance, she explained her reasoning. In this example, Ms. Wilson's acted as an instructor by using questions to suggest that the students should respond by acting in a certain way.

As she worked with the individual students in the second half of the session, Ms. Wilson changed the volume and pitch of her voice. While she used a louder and higher pitched voice to speak with the group as a whole, she spoke in a voice noticeably below a conversational volume while conferencing with each of the students. At the same time, she moved closer to students as she spoke, coming to within a foot of them as they worked. Talking so that she was clearly audible to only one student at a time, she individualized her speech. Like her use of wait time, her actions positioned the students as valued and worth individual attention. Her use of a quiet voice with students, in conjunction with her use of proximity, contributed to her identity as a caring instructor.

At about ten minutes in to the lesson, Ms. Wilson swung her legs out behind her, and moved into a prone position in the middle of the carpet. Facing Patrick and lying between Elijah and Angelica, she began speaking softly to Patrick and pointing to different parts of his paper with a pencil. As he swung his legs back and forth in the air,

Ms. Wilson did the same. After talking to Patrick, she scooted, still in a prone position, toward Elijah. In turn, she pivoted toward Angelica and talked with her for a few moments about the work that she was doing. Rather than looking down from a sitting position, Ms. Wilson stayed in a prone position until she dismissed the students from the group. Mirroring the students while talking to them about their work, Ms Wilson set herself up as a co-worker. She took a position that was more collegial and approachable than separate or dissociative.

As a caring instructor, Ms. Wilson provided the students with information and gave them directions for participating in the lesson. She helped to establish a storyline within which the students were expected to take in information and then complete a task. Placed in a social space that positioned the students as listeners and workers the students enacted the identities described below.

Elijah. Patrick, Angelic: Quiet and compliant workers. Elijah gathered his materials and sat on the edge of the carpet before any of the other students arrived for the session. He sat with his back to a set of cupboards, crossed his legs and placed his clipboard in his lap. Patrick joined the group shortly after Elijah had taken a seat. He sat down opposite Ms. Wilson, one foot under him and his head resting on his knee. Angelica was the last to find a spot on the carpet. She lay down on her stomach with her clipboard and pencil in front of her. She maintained a prone position throughout the session. Sitting as Ms. Wilson gave directions and lying down to work on his paper, Patrick moved between positions on the floor. Rather than looking away from Ms. Wilson or the worksheets, all three students signaled that they were working and attending to direction by focusing their attention on their papers and the speaker. They

held their pencils throughout the session, indicating that they were ready to perform work.

After Ms. Wilson first asked the students to share what they knew about fingerprints, Elijah raised his hand. Hand-raising is a sign of compliance and deference in a classroom. While Elijah could have interrupted the other participants or interjected without indicating the need for a conversational turn, he chose instead to signal that he wanted to talk and then waited to be given permission to speak. Though Ms. Wilson reminded him that he did not have to raise his hand during their sessions, Elijah made the gesture twice more during the session. He continued to defer to the teacher as a quiet and compliant worker. The manner in which he took conversational turns and his use of several gestures and body movements helped to shape this identity.

Acting within this identity, Elijah took brief conversational turns while responding to Ms. Wilson's demands for information. Taking a total of 18 turns during the session, a number comparable to the number taken by the other two students in the group, his turns often consisted of one or two clauses. During the exchanges about the students' experiences with fingerprints, for instance, Elijah responded to Ms. Wilson's questions in a longer utterance by saying, "Yeah, 'cause uh in my other school, we used to put it like, we used to um like get paint in your hands and put it in paper." Ms. Wilson summarized and then added to Elijah's contribution saying, "Actually everywhere you touch, you can leave your fingerprint." Elijah responded by saying, "Everywhere." Though several clauses in length, the first of these two turns was still shorter than Ms. Wilson's summary. Elijah answered her with a single word, as he did at several times other times during the session.

Angelica sometimes only responded after Ms. Wilson had waited for as much as a minute and 15 seconds for a response. While Angelica's slow response times could have been interpreted as moves to enact an identity as a silent or resistance student, I interpret her pacing as a way of making sure that she was secure in her thinking. Indications of this include facial expressions and gaze. While working to answer Ms. Wilson's question concerning her knowledge of fingerprints, for instance, Angelica scanned her paper, moved her pencil across the headings, looked up and away from the group, pursed her lips, and narrowed her eyes. Just before answering, she whipped her head around and looked Ms. Wilson in the eye. These gestures appeared to suggest thought rather than resistance or non-compliance. She appeared to act as a compliant worker.

As the group began discussing the content of the worksheet, Elijah again responded to Ms. Wilson's queries.

Ms. Wilson: Do we have something near what we just read that can help us?

Elijah: Graphic organizer.

Ms. Wilson: Okay, you see the graphic organizer. What else is on this page that can help us. What else should we be looking at?

Elijah: The thing that is thingymajigs.

Ms. Wilson: Okay, what are those thingymajigs called?

Elijah: They're called fingerprints.

Ms. Wilson: Pictures?

Elijah: Yes, pictures, pictures of fingerprints.

After being initially prompted to talk about the page and after giving an answer, Elijah took three turns each consisting of declarative clauses of five words or less. In the first of

these turns, Elijah omitted verbs. In the other two, he used a simple sentence structure, stringing together a subject, a verb, and a direct object. Speaking in short spurts and taking few conversational turns in comparison to the teacher, Elijah positioned himself as a quiet but compliant student.

Toward the end of the session, during the independent work period, Angelica and Patrick asked procedural questions aimed at understanding what they were supposed to do. Angelica, for example, asked about where she should write on the worksheet. She said, “Uh, right here, so we can take notes?” Pointing to the worksheet to indicate a location and saying, “Right here,” Angelica called attention to a possible site for work. Beginning an interrogative clause with a subject, *we*, she suggested that she was looking for confirmation or assurance.

Patrick asked Ms. Wilson about where he should write some of the information he had found saying, “Put it - put this one, uh, types of fingerprints is known as the loop?*(rising intonation)*” Though the structure of this clause appeared imperative, Patrick’s rising intonation suggested that he was asking a question. Here, he sought information about how he should complete his work. By asking these types of procedural questions, Angelica and Patrick demonstrated a need to comply with expectations.

Elijah, during the independent work period, made gestures that indicated acceptance of Ms. Wilson’s demands; that he was acting as a compliant student. Several times, Elijah stopped what he had been working on in order to show his paper to the teacher. Though he had not been prompted to do so at any point in the lesson, Elijah appeared to be giving Ms. Wilson an opportunity to check his work or to validate his ideas. In one instance, he propped his clipboard up in front of her, pointed to his work

with his pencil, and said, “Lookit.” Ms. Wilson recognized that he was sharing information that he had found on the worksheet saying, “Yes, Elijah just pointed out their right here, the same words are over here.”

Approximately 15 minutes into the lesson, Elijah removed his paper from the clipboard and presented it to Ms. Wilson as she worked with Patrick. Saying, “I’m done,” he held up the paper so that she could take a look at it. Though Ms. Wilson did not evaluate his work and said only, “Hold on one second,” Elijah smiled and appeared to reread what he had written. He held the paper out to Ms. Wilson again after a few moments. Though he did not contribute to the discussion frequently or at length, he used nonverbal signs to communicate his compliance with Ms. Wilson’s requests that he complete the graphic organizer.

While enacting identities as quiet and compliant workers, the students did not address one another directly. I did not observe any instances in which the students answered a question asked by another student, asked another student a question, or directed a comment about the session or the content of the lesson toward another student. By working parallel to one another, each student suggested that the other students were also workers. They were not charged with cooperating or collaborating, they were supposed to labor independently during the session. As quiet and compliant workers, Elijah, Angelica, and Patrick participated in a literacy practice I refer to as *Small-Group Activity*. This practice is described in the next section.

Literacy practice: Small-Group Activity. As a literacy practice, a way of interacting with texts in the world, *Small-Group Activity* involved completing a series of tasks related to a the graphic organizer worksheet. The worksheet served as the focus for

action and interaction during the session. Ms. Wilson asked the students what they knew about fingerprints, the topic of the informational paragraph, and the students answered. Responses were brief and tended to follow an IRE pattern. Each student answered Ms. Wilson's questions in turn, but without elaboration or significant detail. This suggests that they were responding as a way of fulfilling a task centered on the topic of fingerprints, not exchanging ideas or co-constructing new knowledge about the subject.

Following these exchanges, the students read aloud together from the worksheet. Choral reading appeared central to *Small-Group Activity*. After Ms. Wilson gave directions for reading, the students read along quietly as Ms. Wilson read aloud. They moved their pencils and fingers across the page as they looked at the text. Following this first reading, the group read the paragraph in unison again. This time, Ms. Wilson emphasized the importance of reading chorally by giving directions for participating,

We are going to read this one more time and we're gonna read it together all of us are going to read it at the same time. Okay guys (*rising intonation*). We're gonna start on the count of three, starting at the first word. One, two, three.

Using the pronoun *we* several times and saying that they would read *together* and *at the same time*, Ms. Wilson stressed that students were to read as a group. Counting down, she framed the activity as a requirement and gave the students a marker at which to begin reading. The passage was read a third time after Ms. Wilson again gave directions for reading as a group. Her directions and the repeated practice of the activity suggested the importance of completing the task of reading chorally.

The directions on the students' worksheets read, "Find the details from the paragraph that tell about the topic. Write them in the web." Writing, the directions

suggested, was an important part of interacting with the text. Ms. Wilson's instructions reinforced this idea. Saying that the students needed to identify and collect details from the informational paragraph, she explained that, "This (*the example detail*) isn't even a complete sentence. You don't have to write in a complete sentence. You can just write a few words that describe that thing. So you don't need to copy it word for word." She continued by explaining how to paraphrase concepts in writing. Neither the directions nor Ms. Wilson's instructions left room for open-ended responses. The students were to write information summarized or pulled directly from the sheet. They were to complete a writing task rather than create a personal response or original work. The students were not choosing a writing topic and did not have the freedom to structure the texts that they produced.

The students mentioned writing several times, asking questions and talking about what they should write and where. Angelica, for instance, after saying that details could be found in the paragraph, asked, "So we can take notes?" Asking this question, she sought information about how to complete the work that she had been given. Writing on the worksheet, it appeared, was central to the practice in which the participants were engaged.

Each of the students read the informational paragraph independently as they began looking for information to write on the graphic organizer. They did so without direction from the teacher. At one point, Patrick stopped to make sure that he was reading the right part of the paragraph. He froze, looked up at Ms. Wilson, and said, "I'm thinking about that, that—do we have to be, like, from here? (*rising intonation*)" He then reread the text silently. The other students continued to alternate between reading and writing.

Given a short paragraph and asked to find information, the students in their identities as workers studied the text independently.

In sum, *Small-Group Activity* involved completing a set of literacy tasks and activities related to a worksheet (graphic organizer) while working in a group. The students answered questions on the topic of fingerprints and about the content of the worksheet. They completed repeated choral and silent readings and wrote on the graphic organizer. Specific directions guided participation in each activity. In general, the tasks required of the students were closed-ended, having one outcome or answer.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND INSIGHTS

Identities matter in elementary school classrooms. Socially constructed and sustained, they develop and evolve in complex social environments including small-group classroom settings (Gee, 2012; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). The identities that students enact are related to engagement in literacy practices, ways of interacting with texts in the world (Barton and Hamilton, 2005; Moje, Luke, Davies, and Street, 2009). My dissertation study was designed to examine how students and teachers positioned themselves and one another in the context of three different small-group settings. Additionally, the study sought to explore the literacy practices that students engaged in as they took up and enacted these identities. In my study, I inquired about what happened as students and teachers interacted in small-group settings. More specifically, I asked:

- How do students and teachers position one another and how do they position themselves as they enact identities in the context of small-group settings?
- What kinds of literacy practices are used as students and teachers enact identities in small-group settings?

To answer these questions, I applied elements of D/discourse analysis (Gee, 2005, 2011), and multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA) (Kress, 2012) as I looked closely at video and audio taped recordings and transcripts of small-group . Data, which were collected over two years in two different classrooms, were repeatedly audited and analyzed in order to identify actions, gestures, and uses of language associated with

socially recognizable identities, acts of positioning, and engagement in specific literacy practices.

In this chapter, I explain and discuss how the analyses relate to my research questions and provide an interpretation of the findings from the analyses of the three sessions described in Chapter 4. In the first two sections, I discuss acts of positioning and identity enactment and the literacy practices that the participants engaged in as they enacted identities. In the third section, I illustrate connections among literacy practices, identities, positions, and figured worlds. In this section, I also develop a model for exploring relationships among these social constructs. In the final sections, I propose methodological, theoretical, and practical implications for these findings and discuss implications for future research. In closing, I reflect on how this research has influenced the ways in which I think about literacy instruction in elementary school classrooms.

Interpretations

Identities and positioning. My analysis suggests that the artifacts used and produced during the session influenced the development of specific figured worlds. Like Adrian (2004) and Edberg (2004), I found that the materials the students were given for use during the sessions contributed to the development of storylines that framed what it meant to enact identities as certain kinds of people. The literature circle role sheets in Ms. Flores' class in Year 1, for instance, explicitly stated what was expected of a student performing as a Discussion Leader. In this identity, a student was expected to read questions, listen to answers, and then provide answers that he or she had written. The sheets positioned the students in certain ways. Similarly, the open-ended response journals in Ms. Flores' class in Year 2, which did not specifically delimit the form or

content to be included in the responses used as the basis for discussions, positioned students as experts capable of making decisions about how to respond to the assigned reading. The graphic organizer worksheets positioned Ms. Wilson's students as workers. They were, in these identities, expected to complete a series of tasks related to the completion of the sheet.

The figured worlds that developed around these artifacts and in relation to the participants' use of language, gesture, and materials were related to the kinds of identities that the students and teachers enacted. Consistent with Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain (1998) and Gee (2011), I found that the figured worlds suggested identities for individuals. At the same time, the storylines associated with each session gave meaning to the identities that the participants enacted. Elijah, in a *Small-Group Lesson*, was expected to talk about what he knew about fingerprints, participate in choral readings, and write on his copy of the worksheet. He enacted an identity as a worker by participating in these activities by reading silently and asking Ms. Wilson if he had completed the worksheet correctly. Through the lens provided by the figured world, he could be seen as a compliant worker. Ryan was positioned as a Story Connector, an identity that was recognizable in relation to a specific figured world, a *Literature Circle*. Given direct commands, encouraged to talk with the group, and provided with specific directions for responding and reporting, a Story Connector was expected to respond in particular ways. Using an informal vernacular, making counterproposals, hedging, responding to demands, and reading directly from his role sheet, he could be seen in this identity.

Gee (2012) and Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain (1998) posit that identities are fluid and changeable. People use language, along with other signs and signals, as they work to be recognized in specific identities across different social contexts. Moje, Luke, Davies, and Street (2009) propose that identities, while fluid, can accrete or become layered over time. I found that participants' identities were like a tesseract. They were fluid, layered, and multi-dimensional in the context of small-group settings (Marsh, Krauter, and Lammers, 2014).

Ryan, for example, moved between an identity as a Story Connector and a disruptor. At times he responded to demands, used language common among the participants, and applied rising intonations and hedges to signal group participation and cooperation as the Story Connector. At other times, he enacted an identity as a disruptor by making peculiar sounds, harshly contradicting the other participants, moving away from the group on the carpet, and interrupting the flow of the discussion. A model representing his identities is provided in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4. Ryan's Identities

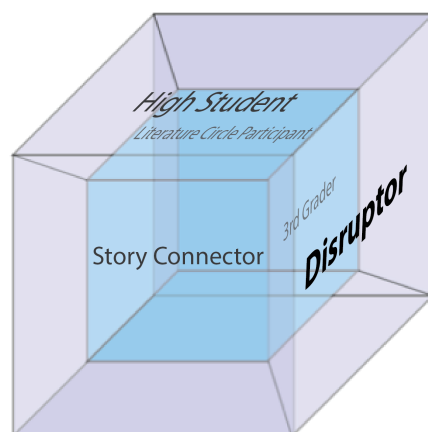


Figure 4. Ryan's identities as a high student, literature circle participant, story connector, 3rd grader, and disruptor.

To fully conceptualize this model, I imagine the unlabeled facets of the tesseract filled with identities that Ryan enacted outside of the context of the *Literature Circle*. I also envision the tesseract in constant motion, facets layering and coming in and out of view over time. A link to a file illustrating the tesseract in motion is included here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-WyreE9ZkI> (throughthedoors, 2008). The identities that the participants enacted were related to the use of specific literacy practices. These practices are discussed in the next section.

Literacy practices. The findings of this study support the idea that certain identities are related to the use of specific literacy practices (Moje, Luke, Davies, & Street, 2009). Performing an identity as a Story Connector, Ryan engaged in *Circling Around Literacy* in Ms. Flores' class in Year 1. He read from his role sheet, asked and answered questions, and made proposals and counterproposals about the content and meaning of the assigned novel. He completed tasks and assignments and participated in continuous discussion about the book.

Engagement in the literacy practice in Ms. Flores' class (Year 2) was associated with enacting identities as an expert participant, a literature discussant, and (for some students) a comedian. Hunter, enacting an identity as an expert participant, introduced topics for discussion, used language that suggested a willingness to co-construct meanings in relation to the assigned novel, and took a high number of conversational turns. As he did so, he engaged in *Book Talk*. I associated this practice with open discussion on a wide range of topics related to a central novel. As students enacted identities as compliant workers in Ms. Wilson's class in Year 2, students engaged in *Small-Group Activity*. While Figure 4 represents an individual's identities, a more

complex model is needed in order to account for interactions between individuals and relationships among figured worlds, identities, positions, and literacy practices. This model is described in the next section.

A web of relations: Figured worlds, identities, and literacy practices. Viewed as a whole, my findings suggest that figured worlds, identities, and literacy practices were interconnected in the context of small-group settings. While connections have been drawn between identities and literacy practices (Moje, Like, Davies, & Street, 2009) and between figured worlds and identities (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998), findings presented here suggest that figured worlds, identities, and literacy practices were intertwined. Rather than conceiving of a linear relationship between two of these social constructs at a time, I posit that the relationship is more like a spider's web with figured worlds, identities, and literacy practices crossing over and influencing one another reflexively and at multiple points. A simplified illustration of this web of relations can be drawn using the session recorded Ms. Wilson's class in Year 2.

During this small-group lesson, a figured world evolved in relation to the language and gestures used by a teacher acting as an instructor. The worksheet distributed for use during the session further defined expectations for participation in the figured world. This world positioned students as workers in charge of completing tasks. Acting in identities as compliant workers, the students used language and performed gestures and actions that made it acceptable to answer questions in brief spurts and comply with demands, further shaping the figured world itself. The students engaged in *Small-Group Activity*, a literacy practice, during the session. As a part of *Small-Group Activity*, students answered closed-ended questions about the text, provided information about the

topic of discussion, and read the text chorally. The students' actions normalized task completion and helped to configure what could be considered acceptable. A graphic representing this web of relations can be seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Web of Relation

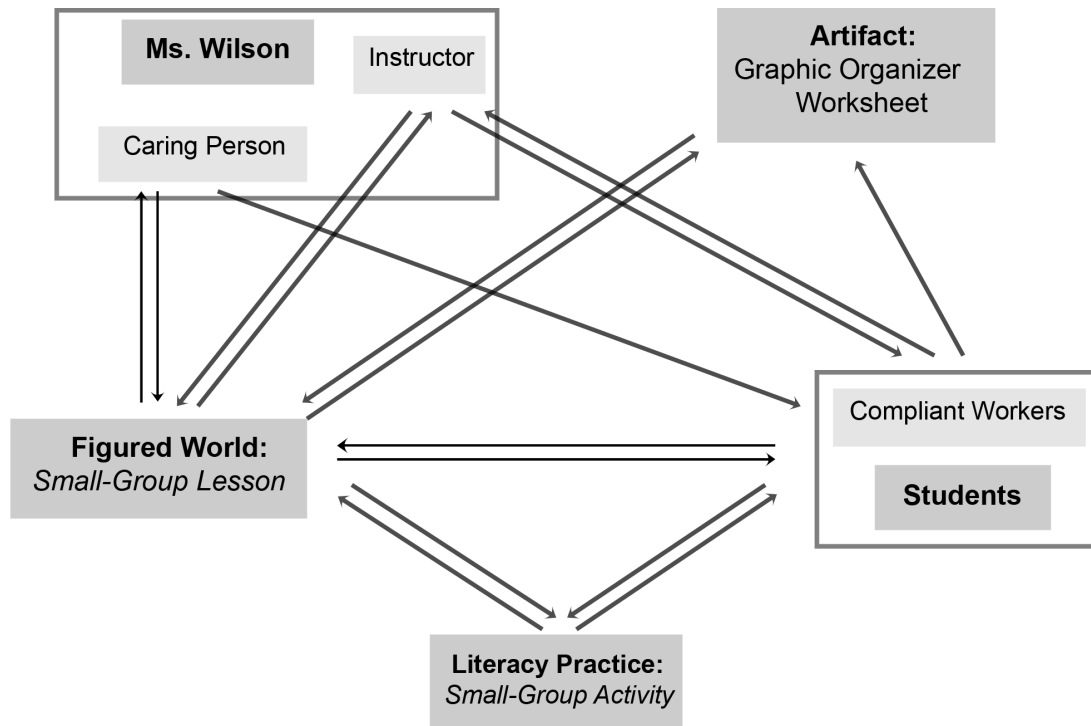


Figure 5. A Web of Relations.

There are several methodological, theoretical, and practical implications to these findings.

Implications

Using MMDA in conjunction with D/discourse analysis to look at the kinds of identities and literacy practices that participants enacted and used during a literacy event (a group activity involving literacy) yielded methodological implications. Finding that figured worlds, identities, positioning, and literacy practices were linked, my study also had theoretical implications related to examining classroom interactions and teacher and

student identities. Additionally, the findings of my analysis had practical implications related to teaching and learning literacy in small-group settings. These implications are presented below.

Methodological implications. Methodologies associated with critical discourse analysis often draw on methods used in other areas of the social sciences and combine methods from within the field of itself (i.e. Dworin & Bomer, 2008; Rogers, 2002; Young, 2004). In the present study, MMDA was used to look at the ways that participants used of variety of signs and signals to enact identities. These included, among other things, gestures, individual's physical proximity to other participants, participants use of pronouns, and the use of culturally relevant references (i.e. literature circle role titles). D/discourse analysis was employed in order to make inferences about what students and teachers meant as they spoke and about what they hoped to accomplish in the context of each session (Gee, 2011). This was achieved by closely examining the characteristics of the language that the participants used as they interacted.

Together, the methodologies helped me to develop a more complete picture of what the students and teachers were trying to do during the sessions. The combination helped me to look at language and the other "stuff" used by the participants as they positioned one another and enacted identities (Gee, 2005). In Wilson's class in Year 2, for instance, I was able to draw inferences about the teacher's use of counting to get students to begin reading chorally and her use of the phrase *right now* to impart a sense of urgency. I determined that she was acting as an instructor, someone imparting information and skills during a lesson. I developed a more complete picture of what she was trying to do in the session by looking at the way that she positioned her body and

varied the volume of voice as she worked with individual students. Mirroring Patrick and Angelica on the floor and using a softer voice with individuals, she tried to be seen as collegial and empathetic, as a caring person. While the use of one methodology or the other would have likely led to useful information, findings were enriched by the application of both. Had I looked only at transcripts of the sessions, I would have missed some of the identity work that Ms. Wilson appeared to be doing.

This particular combination of methods carries implications for the future study of literacy practices and identities in the classroom. Classrooms are complex social spaces. People combine signs and signals of various sorts, verbal and non-verbal, in order to enact identities and to position one another. They come into contact with and produce artifacts that influence the development of specific figured worlds. MMDA provides tools and guiding questions appropriate for looking at how patterns and themes of action, interaction, and interrelation are used to build and communicate identities in the classroom (Kress, 2012). D/discourse is well suited to examining the ways that individuals use language, both spoken and written, to enact identities and to position one another (Gee, 2005). In short, the methodologies can be used draw inferences about the use of a range of signs and signals in the classroom.

While studies have explored the language used by individuals as they enacted identities in school settings (i.e. Marsh, 2004; Rogers, 2012; Thirolf, 2012), few appear to have employed methods of critical discourse analysis to examine the language used by individuals in a group. In the current study, D/discourse analysis yielded information about the ways that students and teachers used language in conversational exchanges. In Ms. Flores' class in Year 1, for instance, my analysis suggested that Ryan enacted an

identity as a disruptor. He did so in relation to Olivia's enactment of an identity as a Word Wizard (a cooperating participant in the literature circle) and Ms. Flores' identity as a facilitator. An exchange among the three participants is reprinted here.

Ryan: Ah, ha. That's the funny part, when you get grossed out.

Ms. Flores: Alright, any other questions or any other connections, er anything?

Olivia: How are mice disgusting?

Ms. Flores: I don't know if I see them I would get grossed out.

Ryan: You could, the, the gross thing is the when you're not, when you are not gross about mice in your sink.

Olivia: I think they're cute. (*Ms. Flores and Olivia laugh*)

Here, Ryan as the disruptor, highlighted Olivia's opinion concerning mice and then used words with negative connotations to offer a counterproposal. He separated himself from the group. Olivia, acting as Word Wizard, continued the conversation using informal language that signaled cooperation and connection. Both Olivia and Ms. Flores laughed, suggesting that they were building a connection. Though this explanation is simplified it illustrates the importance of examining what students do with language as they interact in a group. It would not have been enough to look at the language used by a single participant since language was used in reaction or response to the language used by each of the other participants. Similar analyses could be used to examine interactions and identity enactments that occur in other classroom settings, grade levels, or subject areas.

Theoretical implications. My findings demonstrate that links can occur among literacy practices, figured worlds, and identities. Literacy events occur within a web of relations. This conceptualization is important for several reasons. First, the web-of-

relations model can make visible several factors in a social learning environment at a time. This lens helped me to understand how the participants positioned one another, how they were positioned, and how they engaged in specific literacy practices in relation to positions and identities. The model is useful in examining how literacy events are constructed and how they play out over time.

Understanding that identities are fluid and potentially layered (like a tesseract), a web-of-relation model can help to relate evolving identities to multiple aspects of a social learning environment. As Ryan moved between a disruptive identity and an identity as a Story Connector, for instance, he contributed to the development of the figured world and participated in the literacy practice in different ways. At the same time, the figured world and the other students' participation in *Circling Around Literacy* shaped interpretation of the identities that he was enacting. Similar connected approaches to using theories of identity, figured worlds, and literacy practices might be used to further explore the ways in which students and teachers interact in classroom contexts.

Practical implications. In the field of elementary education, research and attention are often centered on the skills, strategies, and activities taught and applied in the classroom. The National Reading Panel (2000), for example, drew together recommendations concerning several approaches to teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and comprehension. My dissertation study centered, instead, on social constructs related to participation in instruction in elementary classrooms. From this perspective, recommendations can be made about the design and conduct of classroom instruction. There are three major practical implications related to the current study. Taken independent of each of the other social constructs, my analysis of literacy practices

and identities/positions yielded implications related to how students interact with texts in the classroom. A third implication is associated with looking at literacy events through a web-of-relations lens. This concept is important in shaping the way that teachers think about instructional design and delivery.

Literacy practices. My findings suggest that educators need to consider the literacy practices in which students engage. The practices applied in the context of each session described above included some activities and actions recommended in the literature on literacy instruction and excluded others.

Though participation in *Circling Around Literacy* included the identification and discussion of unfamiliar vocabulary, the practice did not appear to include the production of student explanations of appropriate usages of words or the development of accurate explanations of word meanings (Beck and McKeown, 2007). Additionally, vocabulary concepts were not scaffolded during the discussion (Vaughn, et al., 2009). The teacher did not help students to build word knowledge by explaining word meanings nor did she model ways of thinking through the development of definitions. While the discussion appeared to be dialogic in nature, consisting of periods of 30 seconds or more of exchanges among students and between the students and the teacher (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003), the connections that the students made with the text were at a surface level. Students' contributions were not connected to significant themes or ideas in the text. While the students were encouraged to choose roles, they did not appear to take up choices about how to engage with the text as they performed their roles, an activity recommended by Duke, Pearson, Strachan, and Billman (2007). Vocabulary

identification and participation in discussion were tasks to be completed, not necessarily meaning focused actions and activities.

Task completion was a central part of engaging in *Small-Group Activity* as well. Choral and silent reading was expected. Filling out the worksheet was required. Though the students received differentiated instruction based on classroom assessment (Swanson, 2008), they did not participate in meaning-based dialogic discussions (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003) and did not make choices about how to engage with the text (Duke, Pearson, Strachan, & Billman, 2007). The students were expected, while engaging in *Small-Group Activity*, to interact around texts by completing closed-ended tasks and assignments.

In Ms. Flores' class in Year 2, the students engaged in *Book Talk*, a practice I associate with student choice (Duke, Pearson, Strachan, and Billman, 2007), open and dialogic discussion (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003), the use of textual evidence to support statements made about books (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2015), and the development of accurate student explanations of unfamiliar vocabulary (Beck and McKeown, 2007). *Book Talk* appeared to involve making meaning from and with the assigned novel. While this may be the case, topics introduced by the students as a part of this practice were not consistently related to underlying themes, broader messages, or important concepts that might have been identified in the novel. While not a task-oriented literacy practice, *Book Talk* involved varied engagement in deeper and more surface level discussions about the assigned novel.

Understanding that the literacy practices described above encouraged or related to activities and actions recommended in the literature on literacy instruction in different

ways, I encourage teachers to consider the literacy practices in which their students engage in the context of the classroom. Teachers need to make decisions about how they want students to interact with texts and one another in the context of the classroom to maximize instructional impact.

Identities and positioning. Identities, as I have illustrated, are related to literacy practices. Like Hall (2012), I found that students did different things with texts as they identified themselves in different ways in the context of the classroom. It is, therefore, critical that teachers understand the ways in which students are positioned during literacy instruction and the ways that they position themselves.

In Ms. Flores' class in Year 2, the students were positioned as experts and literature discussants. Positioning was related to engagement in activities and actions associated with effective literacy instruction. Ms. Wilson's students in Year 2 were positioned as workers. I associated the actions and activities that they completed with few of the recommendations made in the literature on effective literacy instruction. I recommend that teachers consciously work to construct students in ways that will lead to engagement in the kinds of literacy practices that lead to positive learning outcomes (i.e. thinking about and relating central themes rather than making guesses about the outcome of a story).

Teachers need to consider, too, the ways that students position themselves and the identities that they enact as they participate in instruction. Positions and identities are not entirely secure. Individuals reinterpret their positions and use language and gestures to create their own identities as they are positioned in figured worlds (Gee, 2012). Enacting identities as a disruptor and a silent student, Ryan and Jake seemed to exclude themselves

from engagement in the literacy practices used by the other participants in their groups. They interacted with texts in different ways than their peers. While the literacy practices in which their peers engaged did not involve many of the kinds of activities and actions that have been shown to improve comprehension, their identity enactments further limited their opportunities for engaging with texts in meaningful ways. It is recommended, in light of this finding, that teachers examine the kinds of identities that students enact in the context of the classroom, the ways in which they position themselves, and the literacy practices with which these identities and positions can be associated. An understanding of students' identities can be used to carefully plan and facilitate literacy instruction. A silent student might be given additional or alternative opportunities to engage with texts in a group, for instance. A disruptive identity might be harnessed in order to shape a critical examination of a text.

Using a web of relations. My analysis has demonstrated connections among literacy practices, figured worlds, identities, and positioning. In addition to serving as a useful theoretical lens, this finding and the web-of-relations model that resulted from my analysis can be used in the context of the classroom to improve instructional design and delivery. This lens can be applied as teachers create classroom environments, plan for instruction, and facilitate classroom interactions.

Knowing that literacy practices involve interacting with texts in different ways, teachers can think forward about what they want students to do as they read, write, and talk about texts. Though my dissertation study has shown that figured worlds, identities and understandings of literacy practices are co-constructed by participants in small-group settings, teachers have some agency in the development of these social constructs. They

have the ability to make choices that shape contexts, influence the production and use of artifacts, and configure their own identities. Ms. Flores in Year 2, for instance, chose to distribute blank response journals rather than role sheets. This choice appeared to influence the figured world and, subsequently, the literacy practice in which the students engaged.

In order to guide groups of participants toward engagement in a particular literacy practice, teachers can construct classroom environments in such a way that they shape students' understanding of the classroom context and of what would be considered normal as they work together around a text. At the same time, teachers can construct themselves as being certain kinds of teachers/participants, helping to mold figured worlds connected to desired literacy practices. They can also work to intentionally construct students as being participants of certain sorts within figured worlds. As students enact identities and as they help to construct figured worlds, teachers can act responsively to relate identities to the figured worlds and literacy practices in a positive ways.

Recommendations for future research. The current study has contributed greatly to my understanding of literacy instruction, identities, figured worlds, and literacy practices. There is a need, however, for continued research. In particular, researchers need to explore (a) the variety of identities that students and teachers enact in small-groups, (b) the range and characteristics of the literacy practices in which students engage in the classroom, (c) the forms that figured worlds take in the classroom and the artifacts that both shape them and are produced within them, and (d) the ways in which figured worlds position students and teachers as they participate in instruction. My dissertation study focused on the literacy practices and identity work performed by participants in two

elementary classrooms. The identities that people enact are not only incredibly varied, they are fluid and potentially layered. In order to better understand connections between literacy practices and identities, it is necessary to explore the ways in which identities are enacted across different classroom contexts, at other grade levels, and with different students and teachers.

In addition, I believe that it is important to continue exploring connections among figured worlds, identities, and literacy practices. While the current study related language use, gestures and actions, and instructional materials to identities and accompanying literacy practices, there is a need for additional research examining links among all three of these social constructs. Teachers spend a good deal of time and energy choosing and developing instructional materials and learning environments. In doing so, they shape the figured worlds in which they meet with students, and consequently, influence the kinds of identities and literacy practices that might be considered acceptable. In sitting at the head of a horseshoe shaped table, for instance, a teacher may have an effect on the kinds of language use and actions that are possible. At the same time, literacy practices and positioning may result in the development of artifacts that influence future language use and identity enactments. In producing a text (a response in a journal for instance) together during a session, participants in a small-group setting might shape future figured worlds, and consequently, the identities that could be considered acceptable in the classroom. An improved understanding of this relationship may help teachers make better-informed decisions about how and what to do in the context of the classroom.

Considerations and Learning

The process of completing this dissertation study has taught me a considerable amount, not just in relation to my research questions, but about applying research methodologies and writing about issues and interactions that I see as complex and involved. The process has also informed my practice as a teacher and literacy coach. The next section is dedicated to examining some of this learning and thinking forward about how this learning will impact my work as an instructor and researcher.

MMDA and D/discourse analysis. In classrooms, teachers and students interact around materials and texts as they work to perform identities and position one another. Interactions and relationships among participants and materials are complex. Observing and recording in small-group settings produced a large quantity of data. When I started my analyses, I felt that all of it was equally important. Ms. Wilson, for instance, allowed students from outside the group to speak with her during the sessions recorded in Year 2. Ms. Flores, in one interview, talked about the frequency with which she used the word *like* during instruction. Though each piece of data could have contributed to conclusions and findings concerning identities and literacy practices, not all of it worked to answer the specific questions addressed in this study or related to the social problems that this study hoped to address (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997).

Guiding questions and tools provided by MMDA and D/discourse analysis helped to focus analysis on uses of language, elements of artifacts (i.e. worksheets and role sheets), and gestures and actions that worked together to suggest specific meanings related to my research questions. In deciding not to write about Ms. Flores' use of the word *like* for instance, I needed to revisit the overarching purpose of the study, focusing

instead on how the language that she used went together as she performed a specific identity. This approach to analysis helped me to narrow the focus of the analysis and, ultimately, to make recommendations about small-group literacy instruction.

Being a classroom teacher. The completion of my dissertation study has contributed significantly to my understanding of literacy instruction. Perhaps the most important shift in my thinking is my understanding of what we ask students to do in the classroom. When I started teaching first grade more than 16 years ago, I made reams of copies in preparation for a day of teaching. Over the years, my teaching practices evolved, becoming more constructive and less assignment driven. It was not until working through the data collected for the current study, however, that I truly realized that instruction is more than just relating a set of procedures, teaching skills and strategies, imparting knowledge, or assigning appropriate practice activities. Working with students in the classroom, I discovered, has far more to do with involving students in literacy practices, ways of interacting with texts in the world. By doing so, teachers relate to students what it means to read and what it means to be a reader. With this understanding of instruction, I intend to work toward reframing the way that teachers think about literacy instruction, asking that they keep an eye toward literacy *practices* rather than focus on literacy *instruction*.

Final thoughts. I would like to note, in closing, that I consider both Ms. Flores and Ms. Wilson excellent teachers. Their hard work, dedication to their students, and persistent self-reflection have taught me quite a bit about what it means to be a teacher. Their willingness to participate in this study is testament alone to the importance that they place on improving literacy learning. They have positively influenced the lives of their

students and the teams of teachers with which they work. Though my study has taken a critical stance in examining the identities and literacy practices observed in their classrooms, it has done so in order to point out what is happening rather than what is or is not working in their individual classrooms. This study sought to examine the nature and function of student and teacher talk/action in order to make recommendations about the design and conduct of small-group literacy instruction. It is my hope that, as a result of this study, readers will understand the value of considering identities and literacy practices in the classroom, and that they will be able to apply this understanding in improving literacy learning for all students.

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APPENDIX A
SAMPLE ANALYSIS SHEETS

Olivia	Social Languages	Situating Language	Identity Building	Relationship building
<p>Word Wizard</p> <p>Continuous discussion, reporting from role, importance of roles in context</p>	<p>Reading from her sheet “I found one of the word was poose.”</p> <p>Statement - role related Olivia: [(inaud)] No. I don’t get to be the discussion leader”</p> <p>Demanding speech roles “How are mice gross?”</p> <p>Counterproposal, definite negative - Olivia: Well, actually, I was surprised because I never saw um a mouse</p> <p>Command – aimed at Ryan Line 69 Olivia: STOP</p> <p>See refutation chart</p> <p>Giving speech roles - Olivia asserted that mice were a normal “Wait, yes. Well no, ‘cause in my house there wasn’t any mice”</p> <p>Forceful disagreement “‘Cause, ‘cause why would there be a cat there?”</p> <p><i>Dude</i> - informal vernacular, humorous play “What’s the date dude?”</p>	<p><i>Definition</i> - Here meaning the dictionary definition of the word rather than a context dependent definition Olivia: Definition of the word is a bullet is made to be shot</p> <p><i>Correct</i> - Here the words <i>furry bullet</i> correct corresponded with a dictionary definition. Ryan: Am I correct? Olivia: Almost.</p> <p><i>Question</i> - created by a student about the text Olivia: OK. I don’t get the question</p>	<p>Line 2 “I’ll go first.” Olivia sticks to her role closely. She gives examples from the text and page numbers.</p> <p>Line 37 “What do you think the word means?” Listens to directions and repeats what teacher says.</p> <p>Line 17 “and it was on page thirty, um, page number thirty-three” She gives examples from the text and page numbers.</p> <p>See Referring to Roles Chart</p> <p>Olivia read each of her entries</p> <p>Number of turns - 51</p> <p>Introduced vocabulary as a part of her role</p> <p>Line 124 “OK I don’t get the question now. Gotten confused.” Clarifies question</p>	<p>See chart for who addressed whom directly - indication of building identity through relationship</p> <p>Olivia responded to Ryan’s report “Fern is her name. ‘Cause I am, I’m reading that book too.”</p>

Uses of words referring to roles: word wizard, summarizer, illustrator

Teacher	Ryan	Alexis	Katherine	Michael	Olivia
4	5	2	4	6	11

Initiated (rather responded)exchanges:

Ryan 7
Teacher 24
Olivia 13

Number of refutations by student

Looking at instances in which participants support or refute assertions made by the other participants.

Teacher	Ryan	Alexis	Katherine	Michael	Olivia
3	3	0	0	2	3

Chart of direct address requiring response follows:

	Ryan	Olivia	Alexis	Katherine	Michael	Teacher	Whole Group
Ryan		2	2	2	4	1	
Olivia	6		5	6	7	3	
Alexis							
Katherine	1	1	1		1	1	
Michael	6	4	3	3		5	
Teacher	3	3		3	2		19

APPENDIX B
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD LETTER

To: Josephine Marsh
ED

From: Mark Roosa, Chair
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 09/23/2011

Committee Action: **Exemption Granted**

IRB Action Date: 09/23/2011

IRB Protocol #: 1109006855

Study Title: ASU Preparatory Academy Phoenix: A Grand Experiment

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(1) .

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.