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Deconstructing Disability And (Special) Education: A Rhizoanalysis

(Under the direction of LINDA LABBO and ELIZABETH ADAMS ST. PIERRE)

This study, a poststructural ethnography, used rhizoanalysis to deconstruct the literacy practices of four students in an urban middle school self-contained classroom for students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) in order to understand how a constructivist learning environment contributes to the positioning of students as abled and literate.

This poststructural Ethnography includes textual experimentation, a focus on the research process itself, and obliteration of the customary and mannerly distinction between researcher and researched. A poststructural ethnography puts the interlocutor into the account and makes the tension that comes with interaction and negotiation between researcher and participant explicit.

Data was collected in the form of narratives written from participant observation, documents including work samples and student records, and videotapes of class sessions and member checks. Data was analyzed using rhizoanalysis.

The results of the study indicate that the focal informants were able to get it right as students in the SLD classroom. Helping others, engaging in research, and working hard were practices that the students and teachers came to see as useful in the struggle to reposition themselves as literate/able. The tasks and curriculum worked to position students and shape their literate practices. Using technology also helped the participants "get it right" as students. Students were agentic in that they were sometimes able to recognize the constitutive force of the discourses of regular and special education and in some ways were able to change/resist those discourses.

While the focal informants were agentic in some ways, they were not always able to eclipse their positioning by the dominant discourse as illiterate/disabled. Barriers to agency included others' positioning of the students as unable to access discursive, social, and personal resources. Getting it right as students required more than my reading of the students as simultaneously literate/illiterate, abled/disabled. It also required that others in the school community read them as able to legitimately take up agentic subject positions.

INDEX WORDS: Deconstruction, Rhizoanalysis, Poststructuralism, Special education, Literacy, Technology, Constructivism

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A RHIZOANALYSIS

by

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the “broken” students in our schools who have not given up the struggle of positioning themselves in ways that have yet to be envisioned by their peers, teachers, parents, administrators, and researchers. It is your experiences that will help us reconceptualize education so that it is indeed special for everyone.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Each time I have attempted to do theoretical work, it has been on the basis of elements from my experience – always in relation to processes that I saw taking place around me. It is in fact because I thought I recognized something cracked, dully jarring, or disfunctioning in things I saw, in the institutions with which I dealt, in my relations with others, that I undertook a particular piece of work, several fragments of an autobiography. -Michel Foucault (cited in Rajchman, 1985, pp. 35-36)

Something is cracked and broken for students who struggle to learn to read and write in today's schools. Although reading test scores have remained fairly consistent over time (Berliner, 1995; Klenk & Kibby, 2000), more and more children are being labeled and placed into remedial and special education programs (Twentieth Annual Report To Congress On The Implementation Of The Individuals With Disabilities Act, 1998). The general perception is that these programs haven't been very effective overall in helping students learn to read and write at levels commensurate with their general education peers (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996). Although there have been several reform movements that support instruction of diverse learners in general education classrooms, large numbers of students are still pulled from these classrooms and taught in segregated settings (Twentieth Annual Report To Congress On The Implementation Of The Individuals With Disabilities Act, 1998). There is little evidence to show that many of these students develop sufficient literacy skills to return to general education settings.

Rather, recent studies continue to show poor achievement by students in segregated remedial and special education settings (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2000; Moody, Vaughn, Hughes, & Fischer, 2000). There is also little evidence that general education classrooms can foster the literacy growth of a wider variety of diverse learners should they return (Goldberg, 1998; Lieberman, 1996).

Alongside the discourse of brokenness, that is, broken programs and broken students, new discourses must be formed, opportunities for literacy development must be created, and students who have a hard time learning to read and write must be positioned differently. Students positioned as having biological and cognitive constraints are perceived by others as being less valuable, harder to teach, and unable to fit into the larger school culture. This positioning by others all too often leads to students positioning themselves as illiterate, disabled, and unable to learn.

Problem and Research Questions

This study, a poststructural ethnography, uses rhizoanalysis to deconstruct the literacy practices of four students in an urban middle school self-contained classroom for students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) in order to understand how a constructivist learning environment contributes to the positioning of students as abled and literate.

The research questions that guided this study follow:

- 1) What practices do four students in a self-contained, constructivist Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) classroom engage in as they respond to and create opportunities for literacy development?

- 2) What, if any, resistance to subjectification do four students practice within the discourses of the classroom culture?

~~Meaning~~Doing: Taking Apart Purpose and Questions

Positioning. Subjectification. Deconstruction. Resistance. Discourses, Practices and Practice. Learning Disabilities. Other Health Impairments. Self-Contained and Resource. Literacy. If education is a field clogged with jargon and specialized terms, poststructural educational theory and special education are perhaps two disciplines that suffer most from lack of oxygen. This study is a clashing and crashing of theories not often seen in one another's company. Such a situation invites deconstruction, a specific type of poststructural critique first described by Jacques Derrida (1967/1974).

Deconstruction strives to disrupt, keep things moving, displaced, in play. While deconstruction resists codification, it is possible to divide the deconstructive process into three steps: identification of binaries structuring an argument, reversal/displacement of the second term emphasizing that this terms provides the necessary conditions for the first, and recognition that the issues being argued often are not binarial, but simultaneously both and neither.

Described in such a way, it is easy for deconstruction to come off as an academic, possibly even benign, method of critique. Derrida (1981) cautions,

We are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-a-vis*, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand. To deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment. To

overlook this phase of overturning is to forget the conflictual and subordinating structure of opposition. (p. 41)

Why bring poststructuralism to this, a study of literacy practices in a self-contained classroom for students with learning disabilities? Poststructural theory is primarily a tool whose function is to "critique, interrupt, and reinscribe normative, hegemonic, and exclusionary ideologies and practices" (St.Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 3). It "helps us ask questions about what we have not thought to think" (Lather, 1991), and "deconstruct not only traditional views but also critically oriented perspectives" (Capper, 1998). If something is "broken" for students in special education classrooms, tools that help us think differently are needed. In this study, deconstruction is used to generate skepticism about the practices of schooling-as-usual that we unquestionably accept in an effort to create new spaces for students described as learning disabled, spaces in which they begin to be not only disabled and illiterate but able and literate as well.

The students in this study at times struggle to go beyond the intentions of powerful others and the discourses that have subjected them as disabled and unable to speak/write meaningfully. The discourses available to them are frequently not the ones that they desire to take up. Deconstructive analyses have the potential to open up traditional understandings of the subject. The taking up of deconstructive analyses raises important questions regarding normalcy/deviancy that directly relates to those positioned as disabled and placed on the margins of school life. The subject labeled "learning disabled" by definition is not coherent, consistent, or rational. What is rational about being defined both as having intelligence and as unable to apply such intelligence? The skewed profiles of students with learning disabilities seem more closely aligned with the

poststructural subject than that of humanism. Yet it is the discourses of humanism dominant in educational settings that work to subjectify the wide range of learners within. It is in such a context that the poststructural strategy of deconstruction becomes particularly useful.

This complicated academic text works to conceal the more personal reasons that I have chosen to work with poststructural theory. Poststructuralism's understanding of discourse helps to disrupt the construct of children with biological defects and replaces those students with children who have been written into place by the functionalist discourse. It allows me to work at creating my own discourse, *our* own discourse. It opens up opportunities to think of how the discourse of schooling-as-usual was produced rather than settling on blind acceptance. It allows me to think of different questions to ask and things to say, to "look awry" (Zizek, 1991, p. 3) at something that is labeled "broken," to raise "serious moral and political questions about the practices and discourses of the field of special education, given that it is the principal human science that modern industrialized societies use to define normality in schools and, after establishing this standard, to constitute as subjects those students who deviate from it" (Skrtic, 1995b, p. 42). It encourages me to practice teaching as a subversive act (hooks, 1994).

New conceptions of power, resistance and freedom allow me to think about the power circulating in relationships (Foucault, 1971/1972). Poststructural theory helps me rethink my fear of losing power, of having no power, since power is not something I have, but something that circulates in relationships. It helps me rethink discipline into creating opportunities for resistance. "The space of freedom available to us is not at all

insignificant, and we have the ability to analyze, contest, and change practices that are being used to construct ourselves and the world, as well as the practices we ourselves are using in this work of praxis" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 493). I am multitudes of tiny war machines, a nomad looking to hold on to my smooth space.

The poststructural focus on language connects with my interest in the study of literacy, discourse, and practice. Literacy is broadly conceived as the ability to read, write, speak and listen. Literate practices are those that require or support the use of such abilities. Poststructuralism is less interested in what things are, however, than in what they do, how they are used, and their material effects. Poststructural understanding of discourse emphasizes the organized/organizing regulated/regulating study and use of language.

Foucault's discussion of discourse practices and power relations describe an ever-shifting network that has the potential to both constrain and liberate subjects as they resist being written into place by particular discourses.

Just as the network of power relations ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localized in them, so too the swarm of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities. (Foucault, 1976/1978, p. 96)

What is impossible to think within the discourse of special education? How does this discourse limit the possibilities for students placed in such programs? Georgia special education regulations (Georgia Department of Education, 2000) state

[A] specific learning disability [SLD] is defined as a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in

using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia. The term does not apply to students who have learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing or motor disabilities, intellectual disabilities, emotional or behavioral disorders or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. (p. 19)

State guidelines also define other health impairment (OHI) as a category of disability:

Other health impairment means having limited strength, vitality, or alertness including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness to the educational environment, that –

- 1) is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, or heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, and sickle cell anemia; and
- 2) adversely affects a student's educational performance. (p. 15)

By definition, then, students labeled SLD and OHI are disordered, imperfect, disabled, and limited. Are such children their definitions? Or are they only positioned as disabled, subjected as unable to achieve, to use or understand language? What role do the literacy practices of such students and the ways they respond to opportunities for literacy development play in their subjectification?

Positioning and subjectification both involve how individuals fit and are fitted into the discourses available to them. Davies and Harré (2000) define positioning as “the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines” (p. 91). Individuals are not simply positioned or subjected by outside forces, however. This

dual nature of subjectification is hard to grasp: one is simultaneously subjected and at the same time can become an agentic, speaking subject. The speaking /writing subject can go beyond the intentions of powerful others and beyond the meanings of the discourses through which they are subjected while *necessarily and at the same time* being dependent on their successful subjection for becoming someone who can speak/write meaningfully and convincingly beyond the terms of their subjection.

(Davies & Laws, 2000, p.146-147)

The discourses of education both “regular” and “special” contribute to the positioning and subjectification of students served in SLD classrooms. Poststructural theory, particularly deconstruction, has the potential to disrupt binarial thinking that locks students into subject positions of disabled and illiterate.

One binary that poststructural theory attempts to deconstruct is that of Self/Other. In trying to define who is Other and how to include the Other in social science, researchers have used a variety of strategies in their writing that have come to be known by many names, including messy text (Marcus, 1994), new ethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 1996), and experimental texts, confessional, dramatic, critical, and self- or auto-ethnography (Van Maanen, 1995). These forms of representation disrupt notions of

research texts as accurate, true, or complete, and have led to new conceptions of reliability and validity (Lather, 1993; Scheurich, 1996). There is no concise definition for ethnography; it is exactly this type of containment that the term resists. My conceptualization of a poststructural ethnography includes textual experimentation, a focus on the research process itself, and obliteration of the customary and mannerly distinction between researcher and researched (VanMaanen, 1995). A poststructural ethnography is a cobbling together of

stories we may tell each other, some to share our profoundest links with those whom we studied; some to help us see how we can right a wrong or relieve oppression; some to help us and others to understand how and why we did what we did, and how it all went very wrong; and some simply to sing of difference. (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994, p. 584)

One deconstructive strategy is rhizoanalysis. Rhizoanalysis is grounded in Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of the rhizome, another concept that defies easy categorization. "Certain approximate characteristics" (p. 7) of rhizomes can be discussed, however, and include

principles of connection and heterogeneity....a rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles. A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive" (p. 7).

Multiplicity, rupture, cartography and decalcomania are other "approximate characteristics of the rhizome" (p. 7). The most frequently cited example of a rhizome is

crabgrass, which seemingly has no beginning and almost no end. Multiple tubers spread out over space, and where breaks occur, new shoots rapidly grow to fill them in.

My own personal example of a rhizome is the World Wide Web. While I know that the Web had discrete beginnings, its current configuration bears little resemblance to those roots. The Web connects a wide network of individuals, corporate interests, and diverse types of data. With four clicks of the mouse one can go from checking the latest stock prices to a web site featuring nude photographs of movie stars to the Disney home page to the front page of the Washington Post. Along the way quite diverse acts might be encountered, not just in the form of language but also in images, gestures, and sounds. While all of this information in the past might have been easily kept separate, contained, the ease with which it is now possible to jump from one idea to another often leads to (sometimes bizarre) new connections. There are multiple ways to surf the Web and multiple reasons why one would want to do so. While one person might navigate the Web purely for entertainment, another might simultaneously use it for the advancement of a political cause or financial gain.

A rhizoanalysis, then, is an analysis that takes on the characteristics of the rhizome. Where many types of analysis attempt to find common themes and bring closure to findings, rhizoanalysis strives to keep ideas in play, to form connections not readily apparent. While all this jumping about from idea to idea may seem strictly for pleasure or simply a way to avoid more disciplined, rigorous forms of analysis or theorization, such a strategy can be used to deconstruct structures holding individuals at the margins and counter often violent hierarchies. As a rhizoanalysis of a self-contained SLD classroom, this study investigates what happened when a teacher attempted to deconstruct a

constructivist learning environment. In the following chapters, the stories of this investigation unfold.

Significance of the Problem

Although they may not be aware of it, teachers are often caught up in the process of Othering the students they work with. This is particularly true in the case of students who have difficulty learning. Students who struggle often truly are Other to those who teach them: most teachers did not struggle through school. In the place we know in the United States as the middle school, many binaries exist to describe students, binaries such as smart/dumb, advanced/behind, capable/incapable, literate/illiterate, successful/unsuccessful. Students who fall on the negative sides of several of these binaries are often viewed as so different that they must be removed from the world of the regular student and placed into a separate, special world. It is a world they rarely emerge from. It is my hope that by describing a particular instance of this netherworld of the self-contained, readers who originally position themselves as Other than us will have the opportunity to see themselves reflected in the common experiences that teachers and students share regardless of their placements and labels.

Conversely, I hope that this study will describe irruptive, transgressive, transformative experiences as well. For those of us labeled "special" within the regular school culture, many factors have served to keep us there. For us, then, it is hoped that this study will become but one in a network of collective stories that serve to reduce the alienation and isolation of being located on the margins.

Finally, I hope that by engaging in this study I will be able to identify and describe practices that have helped me become a more effective teacher and my students

better at reading and writing. My own experiences over the ten years I have taught school resonated with the literature that says students in segregated settings often do not demonstrate significant academic gains. What do these students' literate behaviors look like after they have progressed through elementary school and emerged as adolescents whose test scores indicate they read on the preprimer level? What does one do with such students? What does one do with oneself as one struggles with feelings of anger, frustration and despair in which it is all too easy to become mired? Teachers need many visions of possible worlds in which they and their students are able to open up the structures that function to keep them "illiterate." It is my hope that this study will provide one such vision.

Critiques of Special Education Programs

American special education has its roots in the functionalist paradigm and is grounded in psychology and biology. Skrtic (1995a) discusses special education's philosophical history at length and provides four assumptions that guide progress in the special education knowledge tradition:

- 1) Student disability is a pathological condition.
- 2) Differential diagnosis is objective and useful.
- 3) Special education is a rationally conceived and coordinated system of services that benefits diagnosed students.
- 4) Progress in special education is a rational-technical process of incremental improvements in conventional diagnostic and instructional practices. (p. 75)

These four assumptions have also served as a way to shift school failure to pathology

within individual students, reducing the need for educators to critique institutions or their own practices.

An alternative view of disability is provided by Vygotsky (in Gindis, 1999), whose interest in children with disabilities helped frame the psychological theory of social constructivism. Rather than conceiving of disability as a biological pathology, Vygotsky's theory of distorted development views the primary problem of a disability as its social implications. The purpose of special education for Vygotsky then becomes one of changing negative societal attitudes toward individuals with disabilities.

With his slashing sarcasm, he nicknamed the traditional approach to the individuals with disability an 'arithmetical concept of handicap' because of its view of a child with disability as the sum of his or her negative characteristics. (Gindis, 1999, p. 5)

The move away from functionalism in the human sciences has "raised the possibility of alternative paradigmatic groundings for fields like education...and special education" (Skrtic, 1995b, p. 35), creating an epistemological and moral crisis in special education at the end of the modern era that might benefit from deconstruction. This crisis has served to open the field to theoretical as well as practical criticism.

Practical Criticism

Practical criticism "focuses exclusively on the field's models, practices, and tools" (Skrtic, 1995, p. 76) and is practiced primarily by special education professionals, clients, and advocates. Practical criticism includes the mainstreaming debate of the late 1960's and early 1970's and the inclusion debate that began in the 1980's and continues today.

The mainstreaming debate began during the civil rights movement in the 1960's as parents and special education advocates criticized segregated (pull-out) models of special education. Key complaints by advocates included stigmatization, racial bias, and instructional ineffectiveness inherent in special education programs. Such critique resulted in the enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EHA, now the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), which mandated the provision of a free, appropriate education for all students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE). A continuum of services ranging from separate schools and whole day programs to all special education services received in the regular classroom became the preferred way of complying with the law's LRE requirements. The resource room model of instruction in which students with mild disabilities were served in pull-out settings for less than four hours per day became prevalent.

Although the mainstreaming debate subsided with the enactment of the EHA, it resurfaced a decade later when critics argued that the EHA and mainstreaming had reproduced the problems it had hoped to resolve. As early as 1980, Richard Allington had begun investigating what type of instruction was occurring in special education classrooms (Allington, 1980; Allington and McGill-Franzen, 1989). In the late 1980's, Ysseldyke and Christenson (1987) researched self-contained (four or more hours a day) and resource (less than four hours per day) special education instructional environments as well as how students with different disabilities were taught. These studies suggested that pull-out (occurring in settings other than general education classrooms) services of *any* type provided little if any positive gains in student performance (Allington, 1994; Allington and McGill-Franzen, 1989; Lipsky & Gartner, 1989; Moody, Vaughn, Hughes,

& Fischer, 2000). Meta-analyses done by Lipsky and Gartner (1996, 1989) indicated that pulling students from regular education settings had little or no positive effects. Special education students remaining in regular class settings showed more progress than similar students who were pulled out into special education settings. Poor instruction in special education settings was often cited as the reason for poor student outcomes.

Neither the enactment of the EHA nor the subsequent rewriting of IDEA (and IDEA's 1997 revision) have provided a solution to the problems posed both by special and general classroom models. While critics such as Allington (1994) advocate the total deregulation of federal funds supporting the special education system in favor of inclusive models that involve teaching all students in the regular classroom setting, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, twenty-five percent of students labeled learning disabled continue to be served in self-contained placements. The tension between those who believe that the special education system should be dismantled and those who see benefits to the availability of a full range of special education services has come to be known as the inclusion debate.

Theoretical Criticism

Theoretical criticism “also criticizes models, practices, and tools but, more important, does so by criticizing the theories and guiding assumptions upon which they are premised” (Skrtic, 1995, p. 76). Prior to the 1980's, theoretical criticism was most likely to come from outside the field of special education, but with the inclusion debate theoretical criticism has come from within.

Theoretical criticism, practiced by those who object to the positivistic, extreme objectivist paradigm central to special education, breaks away from the functionalist

paradigm and emphasizes the idea that there is nothing "right" or "true" about the special education knowledge tradition. Theoretical critique is often rejected as irrational, relativistic, unscientific, rude, or dangerous by special educators; “theoretical criticism is difficult for special educators to accept because it questions their taken-for-granted assumptions about themselves, their clients, and their practices and discourses” (Skrtic, 1995, p. 82).

With the inclusion debate, however, has come new perspectives on the four assumptions guiding special education. Those advocating the dismantling of special education reject all four assumptions; claiming instead that (1) disability is socially constructed rather than pathological; (2) students categorized as mildly disabled have more in common with each other and others who struggle in the traditional school setting than differences; (3) special education services are harmful rather than beneficial; and (4) the field of special education has improved neither incrementally nor substantially over the course of its history.

Inclusion opponents also reject the first two assumptions but question how the nature of the regular classroom, and schools in general, has changed in order to successfully address student diversity. Inclusion opponents maintain that until such changes occur, the labeling of students provides important and needed political rights.

Beyond the “Inclusion Debate”: Theoretical Criticism and Complexity

While the inclusion debate may be a positive movement toward more theoretical critiques of special education, there are still problems inherent in such an argument. Although this current debate could be interpreted as more theoretical, it is still a debate, one that serves to maintain the regular/special binary and constrain the thinking of those

attempting to conceptualize different ways of educating students. Such constraint becomes all too real in the “failure of imagination” (Pugach, 1995, p. 212) found in the first studies of the inclusion movement.

Another disturbing component of the inclusion debate is the rush to cite poor instruction in special education programs as the primary cause of students’ learning difficulties. The argument centers not on whether to return students with disabilities to regular education settings, but on what (if anything) must be done to make instruction there beneficial. The inclusion debate provides little talk of improving instruction for students left behind in special education settings.

The complexity of the issues surrounding debates is not often recognized. The debates about inclusion rarely take into account the complexity of schools or other values/principles at play. While few would disagree with the principle that all students should be embraced and made to feel welcome by their neighborhood schools, there are tensions between desires for excellence and equity and also commonality and difference in even the most inclusive of schools. What is needed are new discourses and environments that support such discourses. Such a discourse would not only recognize but would seek out the “disqualified” (Foucault, 1980, **page**) knowledge of those often overlooked, such as practitioners and clients of special education programs.

Neither type of criticism, practical or theoretical, has much to say to practitioners who are told how and where they will serve children. IDEA and the continuum of services is often cited by proponents of inclusion, but there is little discussion in the literature of noncompliance with the law, only if full compliance brings about the desired results. Such a focus on results provides a further reminder of special education’s

rationalist roots. What is missing from the literature is a discussion of settings where the full range of services are not available or determined to be too political, impractical, or expensive to provide. In such situations, what options are available for students, teachers, and parents who may not agree with the range of placements available but are forced to work within them?

Organization of the Study

The organization of the study follows. This chapter introduces the research study and presents a brief background of critiques of special education and a discussion of deconstruction, focusing on definitions. Chapter II lays out the theoretical framework guiding the study, including constructivist and poststructural theory. Chapter III describes the design of the study and how constructivist and poststructural theories produce that design. Participant selection, data collection and analysis, validity, and the stance of the researcher are discussed. Chapter IV builds the context of the study and describes the setting, participants, and curriculum in greater detail. Theories guiding the development of the curriculum used in the course of the study are discussed and juxtaposed with narratives of how such theories play out on a day-to-day basis. Chapters V and VI present narratives of the participants and analysis using the research questions. Chapter VII includes interpretation across themes, implications and limitations of the study, and recommendations for practice and research.

If a deconstruction of binarial thinking and the debates that emerge from such thinking is needed, what forms might such a deconstruction take? The implications of this study have been written using a wide variety of representations consistent with poststructural ethnography, including pastiche, braiding, vignettes, narrative, drama,

poetry, and images (Ely, Vinz et al., 1997). Such a variety of forms has been used in part to represent the contradictory, discontinuous, often fractured subject of poststructuralism (Lather, 1991). Just as poststructuralism resists the coherence of subjects, it resists coherent readings and understandings. There is no “right” way to read this dissertation; no tidy themes, grand summations, or metanarratives of the “special ed experience.” At times this may be frustrating to readers. It has been frustrating to write, just as it was frustrating to live as a teacher doing research in her own classroom with her own students, students who stubbornly refused to remain static over time. My advice to the reader is not to get too comfortable. Don’t lose yourself in the plot, identify with the characters, empathize with their concerns. Stand outside yourself. Question my intentions and yours. Wonder if this is the way things really happened, if this is who these people really are. These are celebratory tales. These are cautionary tales. In spite of and perhaps because I try to represent my students’ lives, they are always already *my* tales. Watch out for my subjectivity.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This is a poststructural ethnography of a middle school self-contained SLD classroom. The purpose of this study was twofold. First, I wanted to describe practices that would provide others an opportunity to see themselves reflected in the common experiences that teachers and students share regardless of their placements and labels. Second, I also wanted to describe transgressive experiences that worked to reduce the alienation and isolation of being located on the margins and opened up possibilities for students to be subjected as literate and able. In this chapter, I introduce the theories guiding this study. In order to do this, however, I must also show how those theories have inscribed and been inscribed by my experiences as a particular teacher/learner/researcher. Well-grounded in sociocultural views of literacy and intrigued by the possibilities of poststructural theory, I brought my theoretical framework not only to this study, but to the classroom as well. Constructivist theories have suggested alternatives to transmission models of learning, while poststructural theories offer a way of opening traditional education discourses beyond hierarchical dualisms into rhizomatic “lines of flight” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 12) more accepting of student and teacher difference. As the two macro-level theories guiding this study, both constructivist and poststructural theory reflect the recent turn that cognitive psychology and educational

theory have taken away from the individual in isolation and toward the view that an individual's thinking and learning is in some way connected to the world outside the head.

Although constructivist and poststructural theory are both widely discussed in cognitive psychology and educational circles, they are quite different paradigms. A major difference lies in the purposes behind conducting research. Researchers who draw from constructivist theory are primarily interested in *understanding*, particularly the meaning of human or social action. Researchers working with poststructural theory are primarily interested in *deconstructing*, which resists essentialist or transcendental understanding. Constructivist and poststructural theories, while remaining distinct, are both considered antifoundational and demonstrate “a refusal to adopt any permanent, unvarying (or ‘foundational’) standards by which truth can be universally known” [Lincoln, 2000 #762, p. 177]. Poststructuralists, then, are not searching for Truth, but rather multiple truths.

My theories are intersected by my experiences with, and knowledge of, students classified as disabled, university-based teacher education programs, and elementary and middle schools in which such children are served. For eight years, I have worked in public schools in positions that included teaching students labeled behavior disordered, learning disabled, and other health impaired in placements ranging from fully included in the regular education classroom to whole day segregated classrooms to alternative school settings. Each group of students I have taught, regardless of age, label or placement, has included at least one child who read below a preprimer level. The quest that began with what to do for such children has led me here, to this dissertation, the final requirement for a Ph.D. in reading education. There are days when I am glad to have theories to cling to,

days when I am still not sure of what to do. Although it now seems easy to look back over the years and see the stepping stones of theory clearly laid out, it didn't seem that clear when I was going through it. Hard-won concepts now fade into tacit understandings and seemingly intuitive responses to minute-by-minute classroom demands. My theoretical framework was not created in a vacuum but rather evolved out of experience in combination with reflection. This evolution is represented through a series of asides (St. Pierre, 1995) throughout this chapter.

Aside: I remember my first year of teaching. Who can ever forget their first year teaching? Fresh out of art school, I'd never had an education class in my life. I got a job teaching students with behavior disorders at a nearby middle school with a bad reputation. During my interview, the principal remarked on my ideas for integrating art into the curriculum and said it was nice I had an "academic" orientation. I thought it was odd that a principal would find it remarkable I wanted to teach academics. This was but a sign of things to come.

One day a teacher whose class one of my students was "included" in approached me after school saying, "I just don't know what to do with Ethereal!" I commiserated, saying, "Me either!" We both laughed. A few days later I figured out that I was supposed to be the "expert" on students with behavior problems and tell the teachers what to do. Teachers often could not get my students to do things that they asked, which led to their demanding loudly that I "do something" about it. My main strategy for compliance was to whisper in the child's ear that if they did what I asked

them to, it would “really piss her off.” This always worked, causing the teacher to go ballistic and the child to beam, looking for all the world like he had been successfully controlled.

Meanwhile, I was taking education courses to be certified in behavior disorders. The curriculum consisted of lessons on physical restraint, behavior checklists, and point and level systems. When I asked what we were to do once we actually got the children to sit down, I was told that putting too much pressure on students might drive them to suicide. By the end of the semester I had joined a growing group of malcontents at the back of the room who interspersed catcalls with talk of lesson plans and units as the professor lectured on. It would take courses in learning disabilities and reading education before my questions of what to teach would begin to be answered.

Constructivism

Constructivism is a complex concept that has different meanings in different contexts. Several such meanings inform this study. In a general sense, constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it. We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience (Schwandt, 2000, p. 197).

Fosnot (1996) describes constructivism as a fundamentally nonpositivist paradigm built upon the theories of Piaget, Vygotsky, and the semiotic interactionists. Constructivism is

a psychological theory rooted in philosophy, psychology, sociology, and education that describes how understanding comes about rather than characterizing stages of thought or isolating learning into stimulus-response interactions. Constructivism views learning as a creative process by active learners who interact with the physical and social world.

Phillips (1997) describes constructivism as

the label or name given to a broad position that has now attained the status of political correctness; it is a position widely espoused in the contemporary educational research literature....Arguably it is the dominant theoretical position in science and mathematics education, and it is a significant presence in related areas such as teacher education and research on classrooms.

Two broad types of constructivism are outlined by Phillips (1997): psychological and social constructivism. Both types are relevant to this study. Psychological constructivists are

concerned with how individuals build up certain elements of their cognitive or emotional apparatus; that is, they are concerned with the bodies of knowledge that individuals construct and store internally (or sometimes they are interested in such things as the sense of personal identity that individuals construct), and they also have an interest in the psychological mechanisms that are responsible for this constructive activity. Confusingly, perhaps, some of these theorists postulate that social influences play a role in this individual process of construction, but

nevertheless their focus of interest is the inner psychological life of individuals. (Phillips, 1997)

In contrast to psychological constructivists' interest in the cognition of individuals, social constructivists are concerned with

how the public bodies of knowledge are constructed--the disciplines of science, math, economics, history, and so forth, and even the common-sense and commonly-held understandings of the surrounding world that are conveyed to all new members of a sociocultural group. And they hold, not unreasonably, that social and political processes play an important role in the construction of these bodies of knowledge and understandings.

(Phillips, 1997)

A brief discussion of the term constructionism and its relationship to constructivism is relevant here. While some, including Phillips (1997), describe those who are interested in how the public bodies of knowledge are constructed as social constructivists, others label this same interest as social constructionism. Hruby (2000) discusses this confusion at some length and details a number of theorists' views on the topic. Although there appears to be little consensus on whether the topic to be discussed in this chapter is constructivism or constructionism, the role of social factors in the construction of public bodies of knowledge will here be termed social constructivism. It should be noted, however, that the confusion in terminology can be seen in several of the quotes in the second section of this chapter, in which the terms constructivism and constructionism are used interchangeably.

Aside: After my first few months teaching, I began reading my students' records with closer attention to detail. It was then that I discovered that many of the students who could not read had once been labeled "learning disabled." The change in labels had not come as a result of improved literacy skills. Thinking that their learning disabilities were probably still affecting their academics and behavior, I decided to take classes on the identification of and methods used in teaching students with learning disabilities. I was excited to discover that these courses, rather than focusing on behavior management, introduced such topics as recorded books, process writing, and cognitive strategy instruction. What turned out to be the most influential material, however, was a lecture on the "Dimensions of Learning" (Marzano, 1992. p. 1) model and its introductory book *A Different Kind of Classroom* (Marzano, 1992). This outline for a more metacognitive, constructivist curriculum provided an alternative to the behavioristic models put forth by the behavior disordered program. Thus, I began the shift toward a more constructivist pedagogy.

Socio-Political Nature of Literacy

At the beginning of the 21st century, constructivism has become a significant theory in the field of reading research. A review of the *Handbook of Reading Research* (Kamil, Barr, Pearson, & Mosenthal, 2000) reflects how the field of reading research is including more studies reflecting a socio-cultural paradigm. This shift in perspective seems

linked to the increase in classroom-based research and qualitative studies.

Much of the Handbook fuses social, cultural, historical, and political elements with literacy. (The 1999/2000 University of Georgia Doctoral Seminar in Reading Education, 2001)

Gee (2000) traces the influence of many fields on the recent interest in discourse-based and sociocultural studies of language and literacy, including ethnomethodology and conversational analysis, ethnography of speaking, sociohistorical psychology, situated cognition, cultural models theory, cognitive linguistics, new science and technology studies, modern composition theory, sociocultural literacy studies, connectionism, modern sociology, poststructuralist and postmodern work. (p.195)

The recognition that literacy contains social, cultural, historical and political elements is reflected in the work of many scholars in reading and language education. Important components of this recognition include an understanding that students bring their individual qualities and experiences to literacy learning and the role that learning environments play in acquisition of literacy skills.

The Nature of the Learner

Unlike the Lockean ideal of the student as blank slate, constructivists envision students approaching the task of reading with learning from their own backgrounds (Gee, 2000). Educators are urged to recognize both students' and their own cultural identities as they approach instruction (Florio-Ruane & McVee, 2000). Au (1997) views literacy as a social process that involves student understandings emerging from the context of their

own lives. She urges teachers to initiate instruction by “getting students interested and involved in the full processes of reading and writing” (Au, 2000, p. 2).

The view of learners as actively creating understanding and building on their past experiences directly connects to the research questions guiding this study. Learners in a constructivist framework are positioned as able to learn and as engaging in literate activities. One might question the idea that students served in a self-contained SLD program are able to actively respond to and create opportunities for literacy development and consciously position themselves as literate. Seeing my students through a constructivist lens means always perceiving them as able to do so.

Constructivist Literacy Environments

Although constructivism may have been the dominant theory in science and math education for some time, literacy researchers and educators are also beginning to use constructivist theory when structuring literacy curricula. There is a growing recognition that literacy skills are more readily acquired in the course of participating in socially organized activities with written language (Scribner, 1994). The learning and practice of literacy are viewed as reciprocal in nature; students’ understandings of literacy practices depend on the environment in which they are learned and reflect the uses and approaches found there (Langer, 1991). Learners then use these practices to act in the world in particular ways (Gee, 2000).

Many theorists have found that constructivist literacy environments are especially important for culturally diverse, at-risk, and other non-traditional populations. Rather than viewing such students from a deficit model, constructivist frameworks allow teachers to view student differences more positively. "When a constructivist view is

applied to school contexts, diversity is recognized and fostered as a strength rather than something to be reduced, erased, or displaced” (Hiebert, 1991, p. 3). In her work with native Hawaiian students, Kathryn Au (1997) found that

even more than other students, struggling readers and writers need to be involved in meaningful literacy activities. These are the students who most need to experience ownership of literacy. Skill instruction can and should take place within the context of their engagement in meaningful activities. The saying that children learn to read by reading and to write by writing applies as much to the struggling reader and writer as it does to other students. Skills and strategies are only as good as students' ability to apply them at the right time. Students have the best opportunity to gain experience with the application and orchestration of skills and strategies when they engage in the full processes of reading and writing. That is why authentic literacy activities - reading and writing that is real and meaningful - are central to a successful classroom literacy program, especially for students of diverse backgrounds (pars. 14-15).

However, this view of literacy learning as a constructive process that includes meaningful and authentic literacy activities for struggling readers and writers has not been the dominant theory in the fields of remedial and special education or in schools containing large numbers of students considered at-risk of school failure. Such students, often from culturally diverse backgrounds, have traditionally been relegated to basic skills curricula that emphasize individualized work on isolated subskills of the reading process.

Aside: By the time I was in my third year of teaching, I knew there had to be a better way. In one of the classes I was taking for certification, I was reading about a different kind of classroom, a type of classroom I desperately wanted to have. I had switched schools again and was co-teaching a group of twelve students with behavior disorders in a self-contained classroom. One of the students was a boy I had taught two years before, one of my preprimer level students - Lavern. That first year, I had discovered that he had never been taught how to sound out words. When I asked him about it, he stared at me dumbfounded, then began teasing me by sounding out every word on the page. We were reading *The Pinballs* (Byars, 1977) together, lying on our stomachs in a corner of the library, alternating paragraphs. Lavern struggled so with decoding that I didn't know whether he comprehended anything he read, but he surprised me one day in the cafeteria by pointing out a girl who reminded him of Cassie, a character in our book. She did indeed fit the description in every way. The next school year, when I was transferred to another school across town, Lavern stopped by my house to walk my dog and asked for some work to do. When I asked him how he liked his new class, he sadly remarked, "We don't read no good books in there." When I was reassigned the following year to teach in what turned out to be his class, I discovered Lavern was right. Reading was answering questions on worksheets that noted the page and paragraph the answer could be found on. I struggled to combine the visions of literacy curricula that I was reading about in some of my courses with the reality I was living through on a daily basis. There didn't seem to be much fit between the two. Since

many of the students read far below grade level, I decided to choose novels to read aloud – novels that had been made into movies that I could show during our weekly reward time. This was a first step toward developing an effective literacy curriculum.

This study focuses on the practices of four students in a particular (constructivist) classroom culture. Without a close reading of the literature on constructivist learning environments, the chances of my developing such an environment within the larger discourses of special education, at-risk learners, and other deficit driven models would have been highly unlikely. Without the encouragement provided by such readings, sustaining such environments across six years would likely have been impossible as I struggled to teach against the grain of the dominant special education discourse of my school system.

Culturally sensitive instruction If in a constructivist learning environment students' cultures and experiences are recognized and valued and diversity is fostered as a strength, it should follow that instruction in constructivist environments is culturally sensitive. In her book *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) outlines characteristics of teachers who are sensitive to the cultures and experiences of ethnically diverse students. Such teachers see teaching as an art, view themselves as part of the child's community and teaching as giving back to the community, help students make connections among their community, national, and global identities, believe all students can succeed, and see teaching as pulling knowledge out of students rather than pouring it in (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Culturally sensitive teachers relate to students in particular ways. Such teachers relate to their students fluidly, humanely, and equitably both in and out of the classroom. These teachers demonstrate a connectedness with all of their students and develop communities of learners who learn collaboratively. Students teach one another and are responsible for one another.

Ladson-Billings (1994) also noted commonalities in culturally sensitive teachers' literacy programs. Students are apprenticed in learning communities rather than taught isolated and unrelated skills. Students whose educational, economic, social, political and cultural characteristics are most tenuous are helped to become intellectual leaders. Students' experiences become part of the official curriculum, and teachers and students engage in a collective struggle against the status quo. Literacy is broadly conceived as both written and oral. Teachers view themselves as political beings.

Kathryn Au (1997) also integrated culturally sensitive teaching in her literacy program for native Hawaiian students. Broadly conceived as constructivist, the Kamehameha Elementary Education Program (KEEP) identified and taught six aspects of literacy, including ownership of reading and writing, reading comprehension, the writing process, language and vocabulary knowledge, word-reading strategies and spelling and voluntary reading. The overall goal of the program was student ownership of literacy, and the curriculum stressed the use of culturally sensitive instructional strategies (Au & Carroll, 1997). Au explains that culturally responsive instruction does not necessarily mean an exact match between home and school situations, but rather connecting to patterns of communication and values found in students' home cultures. African American call and response, most commonly illustrated by the oral style of African

American ministers dramatically questioning the congregation, who then respond chorally, is one example of communication patterns that differ from those found in standard English discourse. In a review of research conducted from a constructivist perspective Au (2000) proposes seven recommendations for improving the literacy achievement of students from diverse backgrounds. They are as follows:

1. Establish ownership of literacy as the overarching goal of the language arts curriculum.
2. Recognize the importance of students' home languages and promote biliteracy.
3. Increase the use of multicultural literature in classrooms.
4. Promote cultural responsiveness in classroom management and teachers' interactions with students.
5. Make stronger links to the community.
6. Provide students with authentic literacy activities and instruction in specific skills.
7. Use forms of assessment that reduce bias and more accurately reflect students' literacy achievement. (p. 839)

Special and remedial education programs serve disproportionate numbers of students from diverse backgrounds. The SLD self-contained classroom that I taught in was not an exception to the rule. During the 1999-2000 school year, 64% of the students served in the self-contained classroom were Black, 23% were White, and 5% were Hispanic. In the first semester of the 2000-2001 school year, 64% of the students served in the self-contained classroom were Black, 29% White, and 7% Hispanic. Any program

having the goal of improving the literacy achievement of students placed in the self-contained SLD classroom with this population would necessarily have to be culturally sensitive. As an important part of classroom discourse and culture, the nature of the curriculum and instruction become a key factor in students' abilities to position themselves as able and literate.

Balanced Instruction Throughout the literature on culturally sensitive instruction is a call to balance student experience, authentic and meaningful activities, and instruction in specific skills to improve the literacy achievement of diverse students. In recent years, many researchers in the field of reading education have grown weary of trying to find the silver bullet (Spiegel, 1998) or quick fix (Allington & Walmsley, 1995) for students who have difficulty becoming literate. There is now a growing recognition that no one method of teaching reading can be used to teach every child to read. Many researchers are now beginning to advocate a balanced approach to reading instruction (Baumann, Hooten, & White, 1996; Cunningham, 1994; Fiderer & Ott, 1996; Hartman & Hicks, 1996). Balanced literacy approaches have several elements in common. Dixie Lee Spiegel (1998), a leading proponent of balanced literacy instruction, outlines several of these elements, including strategies with a strong research base, a view of the teacher as an informed and flexible decision maker, and a comprehensive view of literacy.

There are many dimensions that are part of a balanced approach to literacy instruction, including managing instruction with flexible groupings (Seamster & Valle, 1996), monitoring students' progress with a variety of assessment types (Fiderer & Ott, 1996), integrating instruction within and across the language arts (Turner & Hammer, 1996), using a variety of reading materials (Hartman & Hicks, 1996; Rose & Williams,

1996), and implementing a wide range of instructional methods (Baumann, Hooten, & White, 1996; Cunningham & Allington, 1994).

Both constructivist and balanced literacy curricula can be quite difficult to implement. New forms of classroom organization, the need for teachers to become expert at highly responsive, interactive forms of instruction in which they engage in the same literacy practices as their students, and new forms of assessment are some potential barriers to full implementation of such curricula. Another barrier to the full implementation of a balanced, constructivist literacy program is a lack of examples of how such a classroom should look given the complexity of program elements and variety of published recommendations and accounts.

Aside: After three years of teaching adolescents with behavior disorders I had had enough. Thinking I might want to try teaching in a special needs kindergarten, during the summer of 1994 I took a course on the language and literacy of the young child at the local university. Although I hadn't been thinking of my adolescent preprimer level readers when I signed up for the class, much of what I learned seemed relevant to their needs. I eagerly read about developmental stages of spelling and emergent literacy, wishing I had been aware of those theories when I had worked with Lavern and others like him. I was very angry that none of my professors in special education had spoken of these ideas.

Modeling self-selected reading in our classroom, the professor brought in various books that we could choose to read in our free reading time. Picking up *Phonics They Use: Words for Reading and Writing*

(Cunningham, 1995) opened up a whole new world. Here was something to do and the theory behind it. Although that fall I ended up in an elementary resource class for students with learning disabilities rather than a kindergarten class, I discovered yet another group of students who had seemingly few literacy skills. Only this time around, I had some new ideas to try.

Four Blocks In their book *Classrooms That Work: They Can All Read and Write* (1994), Cunningham and Allington outline a curriculum that balances four traditional approaches to teaching literacy, including phonics, literature, language experience/writing, and basal readers. Recognizing that no one method is successful in teaching all children to read and write but that each method reaches some, *Classrooms that Work* describes a four block model that creates a framework for balancing the literacy curriculum.

Allowing for flexibility on the part of classroom teachers, the four-block model includes self-selected reading block, writer's workshop block, guided reading block, and working with words block. Self-selected reading provides time in the school day for students to read books of their choice and on their independent reading levels. Teachers also read books aloud during this block. Writer's workshop follows the process writing approach of drafting, revising, editing, and publishing a variety of texts. Guided reading focuses on comprehension of text that utilizes either a basal program or literature-based instruction. Working with words block is made up of daily practice from a word wall of common words as well as manipulative phonics activities such as making words, making

big words and word sorts. Each block is designed to take 20-40 minutes, resulting in at least two hours of literacy instruction per day.

Cunningham and Hall's (1998) research conducted on the four block curriculum suggests that it is a successful model for students of diverse abilities and backgrounds, reducing the need for pull-out remedial and special education services. Although Allington is well known for recommending the dismantling of what he describes as the second system of remedial and special education, variations of the four block model have been used successfully in pull-out as well as general education classrooms (Hedrick, 1999; Bowles, 1997). Many of Cunningham's theories and instructional strategies were developed when she was working as a tutor of students with reading disabilities (Cunningham, 1995).

The Early Literacy Project. Unlike the four block model, which was developed for use in the regular education classroom partly in order to reduce referrals of students for special and remedial education services, the Early Literacy Project (Englert & Mariage, 1998) was developed to improve the literacy levels of students already being served in special education programs. Recognizing the literature reporting that students in special education programs spend little time in direct reading instruction, ELP strove to increase time students spent in reading and writing activities ranging from one to two hours per day (Englert & Mariage, 1998).

The ELP creates a framework for literacy learning based on constructivist theory, and includes silent reading, partner reading and partner writing, sharing chair, morning message, story composition and response, journal writing, and author's center. These

activities are integrated within thematic units. In addition to these activities, time is set aside for activities focusing on spelling and phonemic awareness.

The principles guiding the development of the ELP curriculum echo many features of culturally sensitive instruction described previously. Students participate in a community of learners, and literacy instruction was situated in holistic and contextualized settings. Teachers also focus on the role of dialogue and language in the classroom and provide temporary supports or scaffolds that bridge the gap between the child's actual developmental level and that required for independent problem solving (Englert & Mariage, 1998). The ELP curriculum has been found to accelerate the reading progress of students in programs for the mildly disabled in both pull-out and inclusive settings.

There must be many carefully crafted opportunities for literacy development in self-contained classrooms of students with learning disabilities in order for them to become more able and literate. The focal informants in this dissertation study have all experienced the failings of special programs to accelerate progress, discontinue students, and integrate the general and special education curricula (Englert & Mariage, 1998). The development and use of balanced literacy instruction can create opportunities for literacy development and support constructivist, culturally sensitive classroom cultures.

Integrated Instruction

Integrated instruction has long been appealing to curriculum theorists and teachers alike. Integrated instruction has been thought to address several basic needs of education. Gavelek, Raphael, Biondo, and Wang (2000) describe several of these needs below:

Integrated instruction is more *authentic*; being parallel to real-world tasks, not those developed solely for schooling. Integrated instruction is more

meaningful – knowledge or information is rarely needed to answer isolated questions. Rather, knowledge construction is an integrative process. Third, integrated instruction is *efficient*, offering hope for greater curriculum coverage. (Gavelek, et al., 2000, p. 587)

Many types of curriculum integration are possible, including integration of the language arts (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) and integration of the disciplines (such as reading, language arts, math, science, and social studies). In spite of the appeal of integrated approaches, much of the literature on the topic consists of anecdotal cases and how-to manuals rather than empirically based studies (Gavelek et al., 2000).

Moore, Moore, Cunningham, and Cunningham recommend integrated instruction in their textbook, *Developing Readers and Writers in the Content Areas K-12* (Moore, et al., 1998). Similarities between this text and *Classrooms that Work* may be partially attributed to the presence of Patricia Cunningham as one of the book's co-authors. Both of these texts recommend integration of both the language arts and other disciplines, since "integrated units are designed to maximize higher-order thinking, personal engagement, authentic products, connections among subject matter, and links to the world beyond the classroom." (Moore, et al., 1998, p. 32-33). Gavelek supports this idea, saying, "a further warrant for integrated instruction...is that such approaches build communities for engaging in embodied language practices as phenomena are explored" (Gavelek et al., 2000, p. 603). In these ways, then, integrated instruction can be seen as having much in common with culturally sensitive and balanced instruction.

Like constructivist and balanced instruction, integrated instruction is considered difficult to plan and implement.

Integrated instruction is hard work that involves crossing boundaries of the curriculum and the classroom/school, involves intensive planning, and involves well-developed knowledge. Moreover, it requires a theoretical framework to guide both curriculum construction and innovations in instruction." (Gavelek et al., 2000, p. 600)

Given this difficulty in planning and implementation and little attempt in the literature to address integration theoretically, more research is needed to determine what to integrate, why, how, and for whom. Integration's potential for efficiency and motivation is particularly alluring for teachers of students unmotivated by traditional school tasks and far below grade level in all subjects.

Scaffolded Instruction

No discussion of constructivism would be complete without mention of scaffolding. Scaffolding is a metaphor used extensively in the constructivist literature and is a key component of constructivist learning environments. Scaffolding has been defined as "providing temporary assistance to children as they strive to accomplish a task just out of their competency" (Stone, 1998, p. 2). Although the term is often linked with the work of Vygotsky and Luria, its first appearance has been traced to Wood, Bruner and Ross' 1976 article, "The Role of Tutoring in Problem Solving." Early use of the term emphasized the reduction of adult support over time resulting in the child's independent completion of the task (Stone, 1998).

Stone (1998) further describes the evolution of the scaffolding metaphor and outlines four key features of the term as it is currently understood: 1) Scaffolding involves an interaction between child and adult in which the adult engages the child in a

meaningful and culturally relevant task that is currently beyond the child's understanding or control; 2) The support provided by an adult is based on continuous diagnosis of the child's understanding and skill level and assistance is adjusted based on this diagnosis; 3) The scaffolding adult is capable of providing a range of verbal and nonverbal support; 4) The support provided by the adult is temporary and is gradually removed in order to transfer responsibility for the task to the child. Culturally sensitive, balanced, and integrated instruction, as types of constructivist curricula, all incorporate scaffolding as an instructional technique.

Although traditional use of the term scaffolding involves support provided by an adult or more able peer, developers of computer software have appropriated the term to include the computer's ability to diagnose the user's skill level and provide ongoing assessment and assistance (Solomon, 1990). Such computer programs can be considered "electronic scaffolds," (McKenna, 1998) and take a variety of forms. Specific examples of electronic scaffolds are discussed below.

Reading and Writing Partners Solomon, concerned with the effects *of* as well as effects *with* technology, set out to design applications that would increase the chances that improvement in students' reading and writing skills would remain after the availability of computers was removed (Salomon, Cloberson, & Guterman, 1989). To do so, he drew from Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) first described the zone of proximal development as

the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as

determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (p. 86)

The computer program, The Writing Partner, was designed to support students as they took a piece through the writing process, asking strategic and metacognitive questions. The Reading Partner combines digitized texts with questions intended to imitate the metacognitive processes of good readers. Evaluation results indicate that when such programs are used with learners at appropriate developmental levels and in ways that stretch users' skills and require mental effort, computer tools can enter into intellectual partnerships with their users and act as more capable peers (Salomon, 1990).

Electronic Texts Lynne Anderson-Inman and Mark Horney (1998) recognized the difficulties of many students who are unable to read content-area texts and are therefore unable to read for information. In order to address this problem, they created electronically supported texts under the auspices of a federally funded grant to improve literacy skills for students with hearing impairments (Project LITERACY-HI). These supported texts include varying presentations of the original text in electronic form, keys to problematic sections of the text, and resources that provide help designed to improve comprehension. Several types of resources are available in the supported texts, including traditional, illustrative, summarizing, instructional, enrichment, notational, collaborative, and general purpose resources (Anderson-Inman & Horney, 1997). Supported texts are designed to scaffold students' reading and allow them to read and comprehend materials they would not be able to read independently. In an earlier study with hearing students, Anderson-Inman et. al (1994) describe three different types of hypertext users: book lovers, studiers, and resource junkies. *Book lovers* make minimal use of the supports

provided for comprehension and prefer reading print books to using the computer. They tended to grasp the main ideas of the story but missed more subtle interpretations.

Studiers used the resources provided by the hypertext to grasp the more subtle aspects of the story. *Studiers* preferred the hypertext to the book version of stories. *Resource junkies* read little of the story and accessed particular support features repeatedly, particularly digitized sound. They were unable to retell the story but reported they enjoyed using the software. Preliminary studies of supported texts found that readers can read and study more effectively with electronic supports, and that with purposeful effort they can demonstrate increased comprehension and improve general reading and literacy skills offline as well as in conjunction with supported texts. It appears that supported texts can leave a cognitive residue that improve students' reading skills overall.

Michael McKenna (1998) explicitly connects scaffolded instruction, Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (1978), and Salomon's (1990) guidelines for software development described above to the construct of electronic texts. Although independent, instructional, and frustration levels in reading are not synonymous with the zone of proximal development (ZPD), the two concepts are interrelated in ways highlighted by the use of electronic texts. When the ZPD is applied to problem solving in reading (decoding text and comprehending what has been decoded), the distance between independent problem solving and the level of problem solving with adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers becomes quite similar to descriptions of independent and instructional reading levels. Reading instructional levels and the readability of texts, then, can be described in terms of a student's zone of proximal development; the differences between a student's independent and instructional reading

levels or independent reading comprehension and listening comprehension levels roughly correspond to the student's reading ZPD. The use of developmentally appropriate electronic books has the potential to make the distance between a reader's independent reading and listening comprehension levels transparent (McKenna, 1998). Electronic talking books are designed to provide many scaffolds for students reading text beyond their independent reading levels such as pronunciation of words on demand, response options, embedded tasks, and labeled illustrations and animations (Lewin, 1999). The use of talking books, then, can stretch users' skills to read and comprehend books they could not read independently. For young or inexperienced readers, talking books can serve functions similar to those of more capable peers or adults and provide support needed to improve fluency. However, Labbo & Kuhn (2000) have also found that features of electronic talking books can either support or confound comprehension depending on how such features are designed. For older readers who read at very low levels, talking books and computerized tutors have reduced students' embarrassment at their low reading levels and provided non-judgmental opportunities for practice (Hasselbring, Goin, Taylor, Bottge, & Daley, 1997).

Although electronic texts can provide scaffolds for emergent and struggling readers, all electronic texts are not created equally. Labbo and Kuhn (2000) discuss the "considerateness" of text and its variance from one application to another. Certain features of electronic storybooks render them inconsiderate, including irrelevant and distracting animations. Preliminary studies of the use of hypermedia by students with learning disabilities indicate that when allowed to explore the programs freely, students show little improvement in reading. When students are required to read each page aloud

with 90% accuracy and restricted from interacting with the software until doing so, word recognition gains increase (Lewis, 1999).

Mindtools David Jonassen (1996) asserts that computer applications can and should be used as *mindtools*. He defines mindtools as “a way of using a computer application program to engage learners in constructive, higher-order, critical thinking about the subjects they are studying” (p. iv). Jonassen discriminates between learning with and learning by computing, echoing Salomon’s concerns of the effects of and with technology (Salomon, 1990). Although Jonassen claims almost any application can be used as a mindtool, he categorizes applications such as databases, spreadsheets, semantic networking tools, expert systems, computer-mediated communication, and multimedia and hypermedia as tools useful for learning *with* computing, and categorizes computer programming and microworld learning environments as learning *by* computing. An important component of mindtools is their capacity to “support, guide, and extend the thinking processes of their users” (Jonassen, 1996, p. 10) in the way a teacher or more capable peer would do; “the tools scaffold meaningful thinking; they engage learners and support them once they are engaged” (p. 11). In his book *Computers in the Classroom: Mindtools for Critical Thinking*, Jonassen (1996) provides activities for using computer applications as mindtools, guidelines for using cooperative groups, and advantages and disadvantages of each tool relating to the goals to be accomplished. Mindtools can provide supports for many of the components of constructivist classrooms described in previous sections of this chapter, including critical thinking skills, inquiry learning, and higher-level thinking. The use of mindtools in the classroom can also support culturally

sensitive instruction by helping students identify and organize prior knowledge and make connections between themselves and others.

Both human and electronic scaffolding demonstrate the potential to help students position themselves as able and literate. While computer technology is no more a magic bullet to literacy acquisition than any other technology, the potential of computers to offer a variety of supports to students as they read and write is undeniable. Computer technologies are one component of the classroom culture under investigation in this study.

Constructivism: A Critique

While constructivism has much to add to conversations about teaching, learning, and postmodern society, no discussion would be complete without mentioning a few of the questions and problems posed by researchers both within and outside of the constructivist tradition. Sink (1997) raises some interesting questions in response to Phillips' discussion of constructivism (1997), including the fact that not all students appreciate and benefit from highly interactive and enriched learning environments and little evidence exists that constructivist methods are superior to more traditional approaches and can resolve educational dilemmas.

At the individual classroom level, for instance, these important questions (and others like them) have yet to be satisfactorily answered: (a) How do constructivist teachers deploy a complex pedagogy with 30 or more highly diverse students in a space designed for didactic methods of instruction? (b) Where do teachers find the time and the learning resources necessary to prepare and implement such an enormously taxing approach? (c) How

will the "curriculum" be selected? (Will it be through social consensus? If so, will students, parents, and community members with absolutist positions be invited into the negotiations?) (d) What is the appropriate use of technology in a social constructivist classroom? (e) How does the teacher (school) establish standards and criteria for evaluating the merits of students' constructions? (f) Do all students have the self-management and metacognitive skills necessary to be successful in such demanding classrooms? (Sink, 1997)

These questions directly relate to concerns raised by Gavelek, et al.(2000) in regards to the research base on integrated instruction and by Au & Carroll (1997) regarding the complexity of successfully implementing constructivist curricula.

Summary

The importance of students' sociocultural characteristics is becoming widely recognized in both schools and academe. The popularity of constructivist approaches to instruction and learning in the literature and the growing recognition that literacy is social, cultural, historical, and political is probably directly linked to the increasing variance of students in classrooms today. The social implications of disability that concerned Vygotsky are not far removed from the implications of labels such as at-risk, culturally diverse, or struggling that trouble many educators at the beginning of a new century.

Constructivist learning environments where children are apprenticed into a community of learners and receive culturally sensitive and balanced instruction have been shown to improve the literacy achievement of diverse students. While it is

recognized that creating constructivist learning environments and implementing constructivist curricula are difficult propositions, it is also recognized that such goals are worthwhile. I have experienced these difficulties firsthand, difficulties compounded by the scarcity of role models, particularly in the area of special education.

I have used many of the theories and strategies discussed in the first half of this chapter. Operating initially from my own memories of school, I felt a connection with students who fit no one's definition of success. These students did bring strengths to the classroom along with their multiplicities of diversity. Finding myself in the new position of racial and cultural minority, I scrambled to learn more about what seemed like an exciting new world. Perhaps this sudden immersion and naivete saved me from an immediate dismissal of my charges as unable to learn – if I was to survive, it was I who would have to learn. There was no reducing, erasing, or displacing the diversity I encountered. Making instruction culturally sensitive and relevant and negotiating topics with students seemed like common sense. My progress toward a balanced literacy program was slower, but this too emerged from a belief that all students could succeed, that it was I who could not pull the knowledge out of them.

I puzzled over the disconnect between what was described as “best practice” in the literature but regarded as inappropriate by administrators. What was it that was so natural, so right, about special education as it was practiced in my district that a constructivist curriculum was read as transgressive, even dangerous?

Aside: Using the four-block framework in my elementary resource room had some shocking consequences during my fourth year of

teaching. Although I thought I had always had good relationships with my students during the first three years I taught, using the multi-method four blocks curriculum that met the needs of children at many different levels allowed a real community of learners to develop. We were able to have fun together, and although the students came to the resource room for instruction in their deficit areas, they didn't want to leave when it was time to go back to their regular classrooms. Their anxiety at reading and writing lessened, and post-testing showed their literacy skills had improved.

In spite of this success, I still worried whether I was teaching the "right" way. My assistant principal worried that students would be overstimulated by the activities and was concerned that lessons weren't individualized when she didn't see packets of worksheets. More than once she flung open the classroom door, swept in, and loudly remarked that she'd "never seen anyone teach LD like this!" The principal came by after school one day to tell me that my hands-on, project-driven curriculum would be enjoyed by the gifted children. I replied I was sure that it would be, since my children were enjoying it. She just gave me a cutting look. Earlier in the school year I had tried to talk with her about my curriculum and share several books, but she returned them several days later saying she had no time to read them.

My unconventional teaching techniques led to increased surveillance by administrators. District level personnel were called in to review my lesson plans, and my paperwork was closely scrutinized. After three years of the "just keep 'em in the room" philosophy I faced when

teaching students with behavior disorders, this new level of attention was surprising and unsettling. Although I had made a conscious choice to turn my back on behavioristic teaching strategies and embrace a more constructivist philosophy, I did not yet understand the consequences of making such a decision.

Constructivism and Poststructural Theory: A Transition

Poststructural theory, like constructivism, is a complex concept that has different meanings depending on the context in which it is used. Just as specific aspects of constructivism are relevant to this study, so too are aspects of poststructural theory. The first section of this chapter describes tenets of constructivism that guided curriculum development in the self-contained SLD classroom as well as a critique of how theory potentially played out (or did not) in classroom settings. A series of asides depicts my coming to using constructivist curricula in my own classrooms. When I first began reading books, journal articles, and teaching manuals describing such curricula, I understood that this was a theory of knowledge very different from that put forth by the dominant discourses of special education – positivism, functionalism, rationalism, behaviorism. Indeed, that difference made constructivism attractive to me in the first place. What I did not understand was that my use of constructivism served as a critique of the dominant discourse and would be read as such by other teachers, administrators, and professors. Constructivism's

emphasis on organization of experience, on generation of meaning, and on selection of what is relevant is why constructivism challenges traditional beliefs about knowledge and learning. It represents the contrary view that

what we take to be objective knowledge and truth is the result of

perspective and both are created, not discovered by mind. (Hruby & Font)

An interest in how my use of constructivism worked to challenge the status quo and positioned me as a contrarian led to my selection of poststructural theory as the second “big theory” relevant to this study.

While constructivism and poststructuralism are different paradigms, there are areas where they overlap and begin to blur. Like poststructural theory, all forms of constructivism share an interest in the centrality of language. Language is fundamental to thinking, problem solving, and learning. Both theories also view experience as essentially subjective and mediated by language.

The cultural milieu of the 1970’s surrounding the “third moment” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.15) of qualitative research described in Chapter 3 also led to the emergence of the “second wave” (Hruby, 2001, p. 54) of social constructionism, or *postmodern social constructionsim* (Gergen, 1998). A major tenet of the second wave of social constructionism is the belief that “reality is constituted by the linguistic and discursive conventions we appropriate” (Hruby, 2001, p. 55). Poststructural theory also influenced the development of *radical constructivism*, which claims “the function of cognition is adaptive and serves the subject’s organization of the experiential world, not the discovery of an objective ontological reality” (Font & Hruby, 2000, par). While all forms of constructivism share an interest in the centrality of language, radical constructivism and postmodern social constructionism further blur the line between constructivism and poststructuralism. Both problematize the existence of essential truths,

purporting instead that reality is a linguistic construct. They also share the idea that the subject, and its subjectivity, are social constructs and that meaning is always in play.

Using both constructivist and poststructural theory allowed me to do things that could not be done with constructivism alone. Being primarily a theory of knowledge, constructivism is more about how people come to know things, how understanding is constructed. I wanted to examine how using constructivism worked, what it did, in spaces where other discourses were dominant. I wanted to look not only at the construction of (literacy) knowledge, but also at how students were subjected within the discourses of the classroom. In order to do that, poststructural understandings of language, discourse, power, and the subject became crucial. The following sections will describe each of these concepts in more detail.

Aside: After six years of teaching and being enrolled in graduate courses in special education, I had two degrees and what I felt was not nearly enough of the information I needed to be an effective teacher of students who struggled to read and write. I took a leave of absence from my school system to begin work on a Ph.D.

During the first week of classes at my new university, my professor took us to a conference session led by Bronwyn Davies. Her description of her research, which she called “poststructural” and “feminist,” struck a chord within me. Although I had never heard any of the things she was talking about in an education setting, her talk reminded me of the time I spent as an undergraduate and graduate art student in the 80’s and early 90’s. In the middle of my reverie, a

classmate sitting next to me leaned over and whispered, “you know what she’s talking about?” I nodded that I did. “How?!” He whispered loudly. “Where have you heard all this stuff before?”

For a moment I had to think. “As an undergrad,” I whispered back, newly appreciative of my small liberal arts background. “I was in college in the early 80’s. And I was an art major!”

That seemed to satisfy him. But later when I went over the incident in my mind, I was reminded once more of how my nontraditional background colored my views of being a teacher, and later, a researcher as well.

* * * *

Poststructural Theory

The following sections discuss several facets of poststructural theory and describe why I think they are useful to this study of students’ literate practices and resistance to subjectification. I do not mean to suggest that this discussion is exhaustive, or that it is a thorough discussion of the many guises of poststructural critiques; rather it is an introduction to particular concepts to be used throughout the remainder of the dissertation. Many of these concepts are explored further in later chapters in connection to the data and analysis.

I wrote above of my desire to understand how various aspects of the curriculum functioned in regard to students literate practices and subjectification, and it is my task here to explain why poststructuralism is a useful tool for such an inquiry. Poststructuralism is not so much a philosophy, but a body of critiques, such as deconstruction (Derrida & Caputo, 1997), and archaeology (Foucault, 1973).

Poststructural theory is primarily a tool whose function is to "critique, interrupt, and reinscribe normative, hegemonic, and exclusionary ideologies and practices" (St.Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 3). It is not a theory with a uniform set of shared assumptions, but a loose association of thinkers who draw upon a variety of sources. It "helps us ask questions about what we have not thought to think" (Lather, 1991), and "deconstruct not only traditional views but also critically oriented perspectives" (Capper, 1998).

Poststructuralism is particularly interested in the concepts of language, discourse, reason, power, resistance and freedom, knowledge and truth, and the subject (St.Pierre, 2000). I discuss several of these concepts, including language, discourse, power, and the subject, in further detail below.

Language

Poststructuralism is a critique of the idea that language is a stable construct that mirrors the movements of the mind or of material reality. It is also a critique of philosophies based on structuralism, such as humanism, positivism, and functionalism. In these philosophies, it is thought that language represents things in the world, that there is a correspondence between a thing and its name, that a thing *is* its name. Weedon (1997) describes Saussure's theory of the sign and claims "all poststructuralism is post-Saussurean" (p. 22). Saussure's structural language theory describes language as an abstract system of signs. Each sign is made up of a *signifier*, which can be a spoken or printed word, a picture, or other abstract representation, and a *signified*, which is the meaning ascribed to the signifier. A sign's unique meaning exists only because of its difference from other signs in a language chain. In other words, the difference between the sign *classroom* from the sign *gym* is arbitrary, not due to any inherent relationship

between the space of the classroom and the signifier itself. Poststructuralists find structural language theory problematic because of its lack of flexibility in how the meaning of signs comes to be. If one thinks of the connection between signifier and signified more flexibly, there can be many meanings, or meaning can change. Meaning is produced within rather than by language. Rather than asking what language means, poststructural theory asks what language does, what function it serves, who gets to speak and who gets spoken. For example, in considering the sign *disabled*, there are many different opinions of what the signified might be. Decisions of “who decides” become the site of political struggles as language becomes not a transparent reflection revelatory of true meaning, but rather a site of construction where “dominant meanings can be contested, alternative meanings confirmed” (Weedon, 1997, p. 73).

Another function of language that poststructuralists find problematic is how it has been used to organize things, to categorize and sort and hierarchize. This use of language to create hierarchies, grids, and maps is what leads to binary oppositions such as good/bad, able/disabled, and literate/illiterate. In such binaries the first term represents power and privilege and the second term, by serving to describe a lack, helps to define the first and give it its power. An example of how language works to organize and categorize can be found in the language of schooling-as-usual. Children are described as average, above average, and below average and sorted into academic tracks on the basis of these descriptions. Labels such as gifted and disabled guide placement into particular classrooms and the use of separate curricula. These labels are often not “under construction,” but rather taken as reflections of the “true” student, an individual whose

attributes remain fixed over time. Poststructuralism has the potential to enable us to defy such constructs, an idea I will return to later.

Discourse

Discourse is a term tied to language, and as such also has connections to various theories and critiques. In its most general sense, discourse is often taken to mean “talk,” particularly oral communication. The term discourse has been used in sociocultural theories of learning, particularly literacy learning, by James Paul Gee (2001) to mean “recognizable coordinations of people, places, objects, tools, technologies, and ways of speaking, listening, writing, reading, feeling, valuing, believing, etc.” (p. 204). The meaning of discourse in a poststructural sense is similar; “In this context a discourse is to be understood as an institutionalized use of language and language-like sign systems....discourse is a multifaceted public process through which meanings are progressively and dynamically achieved” (Davies and Harre, 2000, p. 88-89).

I began this study with an understanding that Discourses would play an important role in the study of a particular social constructivist learning environment. I came to understand more gradually that “the rules of discourse allow certain people to be subjects of statements and other to be objects” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 485). There are many discourses that construct and are constructed by the focal informants as they work to position themselves as literate and able. To clarify the concept of discourse I will provide two examples.

The first example of a discourse relevant to this study is the discourse of special education. This discourse has roots in the functionalist paradigm and is grounded in psychology and biology. It offers certain subject positions to those who participate in it,

such as directors, coordinators, department chairs, teachers, paraprofessionals, and students. Special education has many specialized terms that work to create a discourse different from that of a more generalized education, including terms for particular categories of students (learning disabled, intellectually disabled, emotional/behavior disordered), service models (resource room, inclusive models), and instructional models (direct instruction, mastery learning). Much of this language has been institutionalized through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and codified through state laws based on this act.

A second example of discourse is one of American adolescence. The underlying philosophy of capitalism, broadcast through various elements of American mass media, offers teenagers the subject positions of viewer, reader, and consumer and adults a range of positions regarding the mediation of such consumption. Adolescent discourse also seems to have it's own language, culled from popular songs, celebrities, web sites, and print media. This discourse transcends local dialects and communicates to others that adolescents' worldviews are unique. That is, when something is good it is "'cool," "rad," bad" or "de bomb," someone behaving outrageously is "off the chain," and terms such as "virgin" are used as insults. This discourse offers adolescents positions such as schoolgirl, ho, athlete, and nerd, and adolescents constantly assess themselves and others to see how they measure up to standards put forth by venture capitalists and communicated through the media.

Like language, discourses have the potential to construct subjects, to control, sort, and hierarchize. Just as language can provide potential sites of construction, so then can discourse. "Discourse is one of the most empowered ways in modern and postmodern

societies for the forming and shaping of humans as ‘subjects’” (Bové, 1990, p. 58). This empowering quality makes discourse and power intricately interwoven in poststructural theory. Those familiar with poststructural discussions of discourse may wonder at the absence thus far of Michel Foucault, French theorist and philosopher, in this description. Foucault saw the connection between discourse and power as a sort of double move. “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault, 1978/1990, p. 101). In this way, discourse not only can serve as a powerful constructor, it may also work to rework the status quo. This relationship between discourse and power is at the center of poststructuralism, and will be explored further in the next section of this chapter.

Power

While language and discourse play a central role in constructivist theory, particularly in discussions of classroom practice, my readings revealed little discussion regarding issues of power. Perhaps because of my work in programs for students with emotional/behavior disorders (EBD), I have always had an interest in issues of power and resistance in the classroom, particularly at times when I have felt utterly powerless. In the discourse of education, particularly special education, teachers are supposed to have power over their students. Teachers demonstrate this power by having orderly classrooms containing compliant, well-behaved students. Those who have power, then, are able to control what occurs in the classroom. In the case of teachers of students with behavior disorders, this control is frequently achieved through physical means, often resulting in those who are the biggest and/or most physical becoming the most powerful. The

discourse of such classes often centers on issues of power and is filled with language such as “you can’t make me,” physical restraint, time out, and removal of privileges. My small physical stature and relatively soft speaking voice encouraged many of the students to challenge my authority and encouraged me to quickly find means other than the physical to control them.

In the case of the EBD classroom, issues of power were not transparent but rather observed, discussed, and physically enacted many times each day. As I moved from teaching in EBD to SLD classes, power became more transparent but no less important. As I read more writings of poststructural theorists, I discovered that I was not the only one interested in issues of power. I was intrigued by Foucault’s statement “power in the substantive sense, ‘*le pouvoir*,’ doesn’t exist...In reality power means relations, a more-or-less organised, hierarchical, co-ordinated cluster of relations” (1972a/1980, p. 198). I read on to discover that the type of power I encountered in educational discourses was called classic *juridical power*, while the type of power I wanted to learn more about involved *strategic power relations*.

Juridical power is viewed as existing in and belonging to individuals. “Power is taken to be a right, which one is able to possess like a commodity, and which one can in consequence transfer or alienate...through a legal act or through some act that establishes a right” (Foucault, 1972b/1980, p. 89). A person is powerful or not powerful. The theory of strategic power relations, however, breaks from the idea that people can possess power. The following long quote explains:

Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never

localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised as a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its point of application. (Foucault, 1972b/1980, p. 98).

I felt that I could see both types of power operating in my classroom. Parents demonstrate juridical power when they say to students, "You will attend school." The student then either goes to school or resists. However, one could also find examples of power relations in the above scenario where power jumps between parent and child. The example above could demonstrate that the parent has exercised juridical power over their child if the child goes to school. However, if the child does go to school but once there refuses to take part in instruction, perhaps by sleeping, the power has clearly shifted to the child.

My research question, "what, if any, resistance to subjectification do students practice within the discourses of the classroom culture" points to my interest in power relations. Foucault wrote that power cannot exist without the possibility of resistance; without such possibility, power becomes violence. Power then is not a binary of dominator/dominated, but rather an ever-shifting network of nodes with power jumping from node to node. Rather than being seen as negative, power relations are viewed as productive; power "traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of

knowledge, produces discourse” (Foucault 1972d/1980, p. 119). The role power plays in the subjection of individuals will be discussed further in subsequent sections.

Disciplinary Power

Foucault wrote of another type of power that he termed *disciplinary power* (1984). Central to the concept of disciplinary power is the possibility of constant surveillance that leads to the subjection and self-discipline of individuals. One example of such surveillance can be found in Bentham’s “Panopticon” (Foucault, 1975/1979, p. 200), a nineteenth century prison model. In the Panopticon, a circular series of cellblocks surrounded a core observation tower. Each cell contained a window at either end, one on the outside to let in light and the other forming the inside wall to allow for observation. Various mechanisms were used so that guards could see into all of the cells without being seen by the prisoners. Foucault explains that the purpose of the Panopticon was:

To induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary.” (Foucault, 1975/1979, p. 201)

The beauty of the Panopticon lay in its ability to function consistently and quietly. Power was dispersed, a part of the architecture itself rather than located in individuals such as the prison guard. In fact, the prisoners could be observed by anyone, and the surprise of being viewed by someone unexpected led to further attempts by the prisoners to discipline themselves.

Although school architecture does have features found in the Panopticon, disciplinary power as it relates to schooling is not limited to the schoolhouse. Many internal mechanisms work to produce the power relations in which students are caught up. The success of disciplinary power as a tool lies in the simplicity of its methods, which include hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement, and the examination. Each of these methods, as well as how they can be observed to work in the context of this study, are discussed below.

Hierarchical Observation. The use of buildings as machineries of control that train those within to behave as if they were always visible to those observing was discussed above. This is one way that desired behaviors become internalized. The construction of schools today includes many elements of the Panopticon. At Southside Middle School, the site of this study, teachers are isolated in classrooms that are located on corridors designed for easy access by administrators. Observation windows are placed in each door. In most rooms the wall adjacent to the hallway also has a large bank of windows which increases the visibility of students and teachers within. Bathrooms have no doors so that teachers can observe who is going in and out and who is loitering. Stall doors are only large enough to cover the user's midsection, leaving her head and feet visible. Administrators sit on the stage in the multi-purpose area used as a lunchroom to ensure that each student can be seen. Students are not allowed to move freely around the building but must always be in the company of an adult. In these ways, students are under constant surveillance, and the school's architecture assists in the surveillance.

As a result of this use of architecture, power functions as a network that holds the entire mechanism together with the effects of power traveling from node to node. No one

individual ever possesses power; administrators, teachers, and the students themselves are all vehicles of power at any given moment. Disciplinary power is thus simultaneously “indiscreet, since it is everywhere and always alert” (Foucault, 1975/1979, p. 177) and “discreet, for it functions permanently and largely in silence” (p. 177).

Students labeled as abnormal and segregated within the school complain of feeling exposed and visible as not getting it right by the rest of the student body. When architecture is used to observe and control, it becomes immediately apparent when one is out of place. Students in the self-contained classroom differ from normal students who are moving at regular intervals, located in particular hallways separated by age. Instead of switching classes and receiving instruction from a core group of academic teachers on grade level teams, the self-contained students remain in one room with one teacher for all academic instruction. Class size is typically smaller than that of a regular class, and students are often taught in multi-age groupings. The students attempt to deal with these differences by waiting in the classroom until the other students have cleared the hallways before using the restroom or getting a drink of water. Even within the boundaries of the classroom, often regarded as a safe space, my students cannot escape the surveillance of others. Other students often peek in the window, giggle, and run away. I can hear students who are lined up outside waiting to get into their next class comment loudly about who’s inside the “special class.” My students peek out the window before they open the door, hoping to avoid anyone seeing them. Their location marks them as abnormal in the culture of the school.

Normalizing Judgment. The second method of disciplinary power is that of normalizing judgment. This method involves the judging of behavior according to rules

or standards and the punishment of any behaviors seen as deviating from the norm. In the world of school, “a pupil’s ‘offense’ is not only a minor infraction, but also an inability to carry out his tasks” (Foucault, 1975/1979, p. 179) Disciplinary punishment’s purpose is to reduce the gap between such poor performance and the standard. In this way it is to be corrective and typically involves training or further instruction. Punishment should never be used alone but rather in conjunction with rewards or privileges. Foucault summarizes five distinct operations of punishment in disciplinary power: the comparison of individuals’ behaviors to the whole, the differentiation of individuals from one another, the measurement and hierarchization of individuals, the introduction of standards to be achieved, and the establishment of the limit of normalcy. “The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it *normalizes*” (p. 195). In this way, what is normal (and therefore abnormal) is established.

Taking the method of normalizing judgement to its logical conclusion, it is possible to see special education as the ultimate punishment for a student’s inability to carry out tasks. The presence of students in the school who are marked as not able to get it right and separated from those who do serve as a constant reminder to those who might also get it wrong and suddenly be removed from the regular classroom. The dominant discourse of special education focuses on each student as individual and how that individual compares to other, normal students. Instruction is to be differentiated based on individual needs. Students are sorted into groups that are perceived to be homogenous after being ranked according to various features. Special education, particularly in segregated settings, removes those who are not viewed as normal, those who are unable

to carry out normal tasks, from the regular setting. The tool most often used to accomplish this normalization is the examination, the third method of disciplinary power.

The Examination. The examination combines hierarchical observation and normalizing judgment into one instrument of surveillance. It is a method of surveillance, a normalizing gaze, that makes it possible to sort, classify, and punish. Foucault describes three functions the examination served. First, the examination “transformed the economy of visibility into the exercise of power” (d&p p. 187). Where traditionally power was very visible and those it was exercised on invisible, disciplinary power is expressed in its invisibility. As in the example of the Panopticon above, disciplinary power forces the subjects of power to be visible. The examination becomes the tool by which power objectifies individuals. Once they are objectified, they can be arranged, sorted, and categorized.

Second, the examination “introduces individuality into the field of documentation” (p. 189). The examination leaves behind a paper trail that captures and fixes individuals in fields of surveillance. Such a record made entire systems of comparison possible and marked the beginning of the clinical sciences.

Finally, the examination, “surrounded by all its documentary techniques, makes each individual a ‘case’” (p. 191). Prior to the examination, to be observed and described in detail was a privilege, a sign of power. The examination reversed this relation and made such description a way to control or dominate individuals. Documentation “is no longer a procedure of heroization; it functions as a procedure of objectification and subjection.” (p. 192).

The examination is the means by which students are marked as abnormal. In the case of students labeled learning disabled, examinations determine one's official potential for achievement as well as those areas in which achievement does not meet the norm. The subsequent description of splintered pieces of students' achievement and learning behaviors is used to place students in segregated settings, subjecting them as pathologically disabled.

The power relations inherent in examinations are played out daily in classrooms across the school. In my own classroom, I see students who can complete daily tasks fail examinations. Many confide that tests make them nervous. They seem to recognize that exams are used as tools of surveillance in power relations. Although the discourse of constructivism is powerful in my classroom, the dominant discourses of schooling-as-usual pressure me to test students not in the small groups they usually work in, but in isolation. In part this is because I know that special education requires individualized evaluation in order to determine whether students are approaching the norm. I empathize with students as I too recognize the potential of evaluations to mark me as not getting it right.

The Subject

As concepts such as language, discourse, and power shift in the context of poststructural understandings, a ripple effect begins that eventually laps at the edge of the subject, one of the most powerful constructs of the modern era. Descartes' "I think, therefore I am," exemplifies the modernist, humanist ideal of the individual as all knowing and the center of truth. It was in this way that language worked to create hierarchies and grids. By defining himself as the all-knowing subject, Descartes

categorized all else as object, a fundamental opposition that led the way to the creation of other binaries such as self/other and mind/body.

Modernist conceptions of the subject become problematic in a postmodern world. If, as Ragland-Sullivant suggests, the humanist subject “is still a mixture of the medieval ‘I’ believe; the Cartesian ‘I’ think; the Romantic ‘I’ feel; as well as the existential ‘I’ choose; the Freudian ‘I’ dream” (cited in St. Pierre, 2000, p. 500), it seems he has some work to do. An acceptance of self as the origin of truth and knowledge often leads to “an individual whose morality allows atrocities beyond imagining but still claims inalienable ‘rights’ that protect it from responsibility to the Other it destroys” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 6). Binaries such as self/other allow for historical events such as slavery and the Holocaust as well as current atrocities such as the dragging of an African American man behind a car and assassinations of doctors practicing abortion. It is perhaps a result of such behavior that the individual of humanism has come under attack by many different theories, including feminist, Marxist, psychoanalytic, constructivist/constructionist and poststructural theories. Earlier in this chapter I noted that one of the reasons that constructivism challenged traditional beliefs was its emphasis not on raw experience, but instead on the organization of experience, selection of what is relevant, and generation of meaning. In this way constructivist theories of knowledge production relate to poststructural theories of the subject, in which “identity does not follow unproblematically from experience” (Lather, 1991, p. 118). Lather goes on to describe the coherent subject as a fiction; subjectivity is “both socially produced in language, at conscious and unconscious levels, and...a site of struggle and potential change” (p.118).

In poststructuralism, identity is conceived as relational, constantly displaced/replaced in the midst of competing discourses and reconfigured as subjectivity.

Just because the postmodern subject is de-centered, culturally inscribed/constructed, contradictory and fragmented doesn't mean that it no longer exists or presents itself as an easy binary, flip side to the humanist individual. Davies (2000) writes that

The point of poststructuralism is not to destroy the humanist subject nor to create its binary other, the 'anti-humanist subject' (whatever that might be), but to enable us to see the subject's fictionality, while recognizing how powerful fictions are in constituting what we take to be real. (p. 133)

Davies (2000) is particularly interested in how subjects simultaneously create themselves and are created by discourse practices. She describes this process as follows:

The dual nature of subjectification is hard to grasp: one is simultaneously subjected and at the same time can become an agentic, speaking subject.

The speaking /writing subject can go beyond the intentions of powerful others and beyond the meanings of the discourses through which they are subjected while *necessarily and at the same time* being dependent on their successful subjection for becoming someone who can speak/write meaningfully and convincingly beyond the terms of their subjection.

(Davies and Laws, 2000, p.146-147)

The subject of poststructuralism is active, always potentially able to rewrite him or herself. Such a rewriting does not come easily, however. The students in this study at times struggled to go beyond the intentions of powerful others and the discourses that

have subjected them as disabled and unable to speak/write meaningfully. The discourses available to them are frequently not the ones that they desire to take up. Deconstructive analyses have the potential to open up traditional understandings of the subject.

The poststructural notion of the subject as unstable and fragmented, simultaneously constructing and constructed by the discourses available to her/him, points to a thread to be pursued throughout this study. The taking up of deconstructive analyses raises important questions regarding normalcy/deviancy that directly relates to those positioned as disabled and placed on the margins of school life. The subject labeled “learning disabled” by definition is not coherent, consistent, or rational. What is rational about being defined both as having intelligence and as unable to apply such intelligence? The skewed profiles of students with learning disabilities seem more closely aligned with the poststructural subject than that of humanism. Yet it is the discourses of humanism dominant in educational settings that work to subjectify the wide range of learners within. It is in such a context that the poststructural strategy of deconstruction becomes particularly useful.

Aside: After a year of educational leave, I returned to the classroom to teach and finish my degree. I was able to implement much of what I was learning about and discussing every other week at the university. The next fall, I began a new assignment; teaching students labeled SLD in a self-contained classroom. I had never taught in such a setting, been responsible for so many students, or had so many readers at a preprimer level. The reading I was doing for my written and oral exams gave me many teaching ideas, but the workload and long distance

drive to classes was often frustrating. Near the end of the school year, I decided to conduct my dissertation research in my own classroom.

Once again it seemed that my way forward was facilitated by my professors. In a meeting with the co-chairs of my committee, I attempted to explain the type of study I wanted to do. Not having the language to explain myself, I came to an impasse. Suddenly Bettie sat up and began drawing on her notepad. "There's a box, and all these things are going into it, and surrounding it, and you're thinking outside the box!" You're deconstructing it!"

I started laughing. "My principal is always telling me I think outside the box. He tells me that when you think outside the box, you're a lightning rod. It might be good lightning, it might be bad lightning, but you attract lightning!" I looked at the drawing, a box surrounded by angry looking lines. "I just want to get rid of the box! I'm sick of thinking outside of it! For years I didn't even realize 'a box' existed! I just want to get rid of it!"

"That's what you're doing, all right, deconstruction. Now you just need to go back and read about it, develop the language you need to articulate your ideas," Bettie instructed. I sighed. I knew it would be a long time before I would acquire the language of poststructuralism.

Working With Language: Deconstructive Moves

Deconstruction

One aim of poststructuralism is to generate skepticism about the discourses we unquestionably accept. One way of being skeptical, to look awry, is deconstruction. Earlier in this chapter I discussed poststructural understandings of language and how such understandings trouble the idea that language mirrors the world. Where traditional uses of language ask what words mean, poststructural theory asks what language does, what function it serves, who gets to speak and who gets spoken. In *Of grammatology*, Derrida (1967/1974) breaks away from traditional, humanist understandings of language, specifically the idea that the signifier is inseparable from the signified, with his concept of *différance*. To Derrida, *différance* helps to create or highlight the space where the word does not mean the thing, where the signifier does not represent the signified, where it differs (from what it names) and defers (meaning). "At the point at which the concept of *différance*, and the chain attached to it, intervenes, all the conceptual oppositions of metaphysics...become nonpertinent" (Derrida, 1981, p. 29).

In order to further break open the space between signifier and signified, Derrida (1985) describes an analysis he calls deconstruction. He explains as follows:

At that time structuralism was dominant. "Deconstruction" seemed to be going in the same direction since the word signified a certain attention to structures (which themselves were neither simply ideas, nor forms, nor syntheses, nor systems)...Structures were to be undone, decomposed, desedimented.

Although Derrida claims that deconstruction is not a critique or a method (1981), he does describe a “general strategy of deconstruction” (p. 41). This strategy involves the identification of a hierarchy or binary, the reversal of the binarial terms, and the identification or creation of new categories that are simultaneously both and neither.

The strategy of deconstruction is one example of how meaning can never be completely fixed in language, how signifier and signified can be pried apart. It provides “a practice of freedom that can help us rewrite the world and ourselves again and again” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 483). For example, rather than constructing the signified *student with a learning disability* as a student with a pathological condition forever destined to remedial lessons in basic skills, deconstruction allows us to create space for a new image by revealing how the traditional image came to be. Perhaps a *student with LD* is teaching a senior citizen to use a computer or reading to a child in kindergarten or writing a letter explaining why she needs a laptop or creating a website demonstrating his interest in herpetology or making more money heading shrimp on a shrimp boat than a teacher does in a classroom. The possibilities are endless. To paraphrase Weedon (1997), what it means to be a *student with LD* varies according to context and is a social and historical phenomenon.

A Thousand Plateaus: Irruptive Figurations

Reading poststructural ideas of the subject, discourse, language, and power may lead one to question my belief that poststructural theory has the potential to open up opportunities for anyone, particularly students labeled SLD. It is easy for the possibilities offered in poststructuralism to get lost in discussions of disciplinary power, normalizing gazes, dominant discourses, and subjection. While poststructural theory claims that

individuals have the power to rewrite themselves and the discourses that subject them, no one said such a reinscription would be easy. What practices have the potential to help us, that is, students marked as dis-abled and their teacher, break the hold of the dominant discourses long enough for us to glimpse alternative worlds?

One may wonder why I, as a white educated adult teacher, feel as if I am located at the margins of the school along with my students. As a special education teacher, I too am marked as different, falling on the wrong side of too many binaries such as academic/nonacademic, team member/independent, regular educator/special educator, and content specialist/generalist. I am outside the organizational structure of the school by not being on a team of teachers and not having a homeroom; I am in effect my own team. I am not considered a specialist in an academic subject. I have fewer students than regular teachers and for this reason am perceived as having fewer management and discipline problems. It is an ongoing joke in almost every school in which I have taught that special education teachers have the characteristics of their students. Teachers of students labeled emotionally/behavior disordered are described as “crazy like your kids,” while teachers of students with other disabilities are called “special.” In curriculum workshops, other teachers have expressed surprise and made sarcastic remarks when I finished tasks before them, whispering loudly to one another “I thought she was ‘special’.” At one workshop it was assumed that I would not need the information being presented because my students would not “get it.” At other times, I am marked as different by the special skills I must need to work with “those kinds of students.”

Although I do not read myself as extraordinarily patient, kind, saintly, or slow, I would like to position myself as outside the schooling-as-usual discourse in order to open

up new spaces, transgress the boundaries that hold my students and myself on the margins. At the same time, I must continue to get it right as a teacher within those dominant discourses if my students are to have the chance of being read as getting it right as learners. This requires an understanding of how power relationships work and how the power that circulates might be redistributed more in our favor. The writings of Deleuze and Guattari, particularly *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980/1987), have provided several figurations that have helped me see things in new ways.

St. Pierre (1997) writes “figurations are not graceful metaphors that produce coherence out of disorder but rather cartographic weapons that tear through the orderliness of humanist language” (p. 407). Figurations have had an odd effect on my thinking. They are one of the most useful tools I have used to bring poststructuralism directly into my classroom not after the fact, when deep in analysis, but at the moments in which things are occurring. At times I have been able to form a mental image of myself as I am teaching, working to create the discourses that subject myself and the students. Rather than a God’s-eye view of objectivity, these images are often irreverent, contradictory, immersed in theory with popular culture overtones. They are a visual representation of the possibilities poststructuralism offers us, a way of seeing the discourses that shape us and voice those that could form us into who we would like to be. Figurations that have been especially meaningful to me are the nomad, the warrior, and the postmodern teacher.

The Nomad

“Believe that what is productive is nomadic” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/1983, p. xiii).

Perhaps more than any other single part of this study, the figuration of the nomad has led me to “get free of oneself” (Foucault, 1984/1985, p. 8) and think for a few minutes outside of the humanist, rationalist, functionalist discourse that has shaped me. I still remember quite clearly sitting at the breakfast table trying to make sense of *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). While thumbing through the book in frustration, particular sentences seemed to leap out at me. Although I rarely do such heavy reading before driving off to teach school, “deterritorialize the enemy by shattering his territory from within” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 353) struck me as particularly relevant that morning. I made a note to read more about this nomad.

Nomadic thought is a more daring, more risky form of intelligence, which is freer and more disrespectful than the established norms. (Braidotti, 1995, par. 19)

Some time later, I revisited the nomad to see if what had first captured my imagination was still there. This time as I opened the book I felt that a friend was waiting within. Without consciously searching for where to begin, I read, “The nomad distributes himself in a smooth space; he occupies, inhabits, holds that space; that is his territorial principle” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 381). Once again I felt that the nomad had something to offer, this time as I faced the possibility of losing a space, a smooth space that was not really mine to inhabit, the smooth space of “my” class. “The nomad is one who does not depart, does not want to depart, who clings to the smooth space left by the receding forest, where the steppe or the desert advances, and who invents nomadism as a response to this challenge” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 381). Although the text did not prescribe a method for remaining, the idea of the nomad as one who hung in

there, did not depart but rather invented a response to such a challenge was in some odd way inspiring.

I am unsure that this discussion of the nomad describes what the nomad “is.” I am not sure that is my intent. What was important to me about the figuration of the nomad was what it did for me, the function that it served. Previous to my reading about the nomad in *A Thousand Plateaus*, the word nomadism would have had a negative connotation, one of wandering through the desert with nowhere to call home. Coincidentally, that is how I had often felt as a teacher, moving from school to school and class to class with seemingly no direction, embarrassed by my lack of power and control. I often wondered why I didn’t just quit, and sometimes feared my stubbornness was not a positive attribute. The image of the nomad as one who distributed himself to hold onto his space, who did not want to depart but rather relished the challenge of hanging on, helped me read myself not as one who was too dumb to know when to go home but rather as someone whose patience was strategic.

The Warrior

Reading more about the nomad, I discovered that when necessary he is also a warrior. By this time I had done some more reading and begun to think of the formal, codified discourse of special education as an arm of the State. In this way I was able to cast myself as nomad/warrior and read those in authority as representatives of the State.

A warrior from the standpoint of the State, the originality of the man of war, his eccentricity, necessarily appears in a negative form: stupidity, deformity, madness, illegitimacy, usurpation, sin...the warrior is in the position of betraying everything. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 354)

This reading of myself as a warrior pitted against the power of the discourses of schooling-as-usual opened up a space in which, however briefly, I could see myself as powerful and able to break away from the dominant discourses holding me in place. This in turn led to a feeling of great joy as I realized I did not have “to be sad in order to be militant, even though the thing one is fighting is abominable” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/1983, xiii).

Did I perceive myself as at war, under attack? I felt that the discourses of humanism and functionalism acted at times with violence toward my children and myself. What the figuration of the war machine taught me was that power could lie not in war but in nonbattle. “The concept of the nonbattle seems capable of expressing the speed of a flash attack, and the counterspeed of an immediate response” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 416). From these figurations then came a sense of power and recognition of the importance of patience.

The figuration of the nomad/warrior led to the discovery and adoption of one more figuration, that of a different kind of teacher required in a postmodern world. Damarin (1994) discusses various metaphors for teachers, including the goddess (p. 54), cyborg (p. 57), postmodern witch (58), alone standing woman (p. 59), and laughing mother (p. 59). While Deleuze & Guattari’s figurations are male, Damarin’s teacher figurations are particularly female. The combination of these figurations led to my own figuration that reflects features of each, one I came to call the postmodern teacher; patient with the capacity for a flash attack, a laughing-teacher-nomad-warrior “undiminished by the ‘real world’ [whose] hair blows free” (p. 59), a “free spirit who can laugh as she dances with the children on a cyberspace dance floor” (p. 59). In a world of discourses of

rationality and functionalism where I often caught myself obsessing over test scores or doing a task analysis of the enjoyment of reading, this figuration would come to me at odd moments and remind me that during those times of joyful dancing that we were rewriting ourselves, disrupting the taken-for-granted assumptions of who we were and who we could become.

Conclusion

As I think of how the two theories discussed in this chapter, constructivism and poststructural theory, come to bear on this study and of what they enable, I am struck by the ways that the theories intertwine. Poststructural theory colors my reading of constructivism which in turn influences the ways I have come to understand poststructuralism. Both theories, read from my subject positions of teacher, student, and researcher, have affected my practices with children and therefore their practices. Although constructivism is now recognized as a legitimate, if difficult to implement, paradigm in both regular and special education programs, this was not always the case as I struggled to implement a constructivist curriculum in my classroom. My belief that knowledge is constructed by active learners who bring their own experiences to learning led to conflict with those in power who believed transmission models of instruction were more appropriate. My own background, upbringing, and education crystallized in the understanding that there was nothing inherently true in the knowledge tradition of special education. Claiming and using poststructuralist discourse was not too far behind.

In creating this, a dissertation deconstructing my students' literate practices and working to form new discourses, I hope that we will become able to see the contradictory

discourses acting on and through us. This may allow us to disrupt taken-for-granted readings of practices and

enable us to see the processes through which we are subjected [that] we may then be better positioned to resist particular forms of subjectivity, rather than clinging to them through a mistaken belief that they are the ‘truth’ about working with, and being, students. (Laws, 2001, p. 177)

This chapter described the two major theories guiding this dissertation study: constructivist and poststructural theory. Through a discussion of these theories, I have shown where they are different, distinct, and where they begin to overlap. A key concept of both theories is language, how language both shapes our thoughts and actions and in turn is shaped by them. This double move of language trickles down into discourse and power and in the ways that all of these interact to subjectify students. The remainder of this dissertation is concerned with these interactions.

Chapter Four of this study provides one example of the complexity of constructivist classrooms and the tensions created when constructivist and poststructural theory runs headlong into what is framed as “common sense” knowledges within other discourses. Chapters Five and Six reflect the practices and constructions of students as they interact with/in the discourses of a particular learning environment and how that environment contributes to the subjection of students.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Paradigm mapping can help us recognize both our longing for and a needed wariness of an ontological and epistemological home. The task is how to diagram the becoming of history against the limits of our conceptual frameworks that are so much about what we have already ceased to be. In such an effort, the diagram becomes an abstract machine, provisional and schematic, designed to move us to some place where oppositions dissolve through the very thinking that they have facilitated. (Lather, 2000a, p. 2)

Methodological Grounding

What counts as legitimate research methodology is constantly being negotiated and redefined at the beginning of the 21st century. In outlining the history of qualitative research, Lincoln and Denzin (1994) explain as follows:

It is defined more by breaks and ruptures than by a clear evolutionary progressive movement from one stage to the next....Qualitative research, like other scholarly domains, displays a tendency to move from one intellectual fashion to another, from positivism to postpositivism, semiotics and structuralism, poststructuralism and postmodernism, and so on. In such moves there is often a tendency to reject wholesale an entire theoretical perspective, or paradigm, as if postpositivism were passé, for example. It should not work this way. (pp. 575-576)

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) go on to trace the history of qualitative research in North America through seven moments. The first moment, or traditional period, began in the early 1900's and continued until World War II. Out of the first moment came many names and concepts still recognizable today: the myth of the Lone Ethnographer, "the story of the man-scientist who went off in search of his native in a distant land" (p. 13), the Chicago school and its slice of life approach to ethnography, and ethnographers such as Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson.

The second moment, or modernist phase, began after World War II and ended in the 1970's. "In this period, many texts sought to formalize qualitative methods" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 14). Researchers from across the human disciplines used interpretive theories such as feminism, critical theory, phenomenology, and ethnomethodology to give voice to the underclass. Postpositivism became a powerful paradigm. Glaser and Strauss' (1967) work on grounded theory and Wolcott's (1990) application of ethnographic techniques in education are examples of qualitative work during the second moment.

The third moment, or "the moment of blurred genres" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 15), began in 1970 and ended in the mid-eighties. Qualitative researchers had many paradigms, methods, and strategies to pull from when conducting research. The following long quote reflects the variety of choices available to researchers in the third moment:

Theories ranged from symbolic interactionism to constructivism, naturalistic inquiry, positivism and postpositivism, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, critical theory, neo-Marxist theory, semiotics, structuralism, feminism, and various racial/ethnic paradigms...research

strategies and formats for reporting research ranged from grounded theory to the case study, to methods of historical, biographical, ethnographic, action, and clinical research. Diverse ways of collecting and analyzing empirical materials were also available, including qualitative interviewing (open-ended and quasi-structured) and observational, visual, personal experience, and documentary methods. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 15)

Another key influence on researchers of the third moment was Clifford Geertz and his arguments for blurred genres (Geertz, 1983) and rich, thick, description (Geertz, 1973). Social scientists began looking to the humanities for models and methods. New approaches were beginning to emerge, including poststructuralism, neopositivism, and deconstruction.

The fourth moment, or the crisis of representation, began in the mid -1980's. New works such as *Writing Culture* (Clifford & Marcus, 1986) and *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (Marcus & Fischer, 1986) articulated the consequences of Geertz's blurred genres and made research and writing more reflexive. Validity, reliability, and objectivity were problematized. Writing developed as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2000).

As a series of written representations, the field-worker's texts flow from the field experience, through intermediate works, to later work, and finally to the research text, which is the public presentation of the ethnographic and narrative experience. Thus fieldwork and writing blur into one another. There is, in the final analysis, no difference between writing and fieldwork. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 17)

The fifth moment, or “the postmodern period of experimental ethnographic writing” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 17), emerged as qualitative researchers worked through issues of validity, reliability, and objectivity called into question in the fourth moment.

The sixth and seventh moments are now upon us. The sixth (postexperimental) moment involves what Denzin and Lincoln (2000) call the “triple crisis” of representation, legitimation, and praxis. “Qualitative researchers can no longer directly capture lived experience....the direct link between experience and text [is] problematic” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 17). The crisis of legitimation asks the question, “How are qualitative studies to be evaluated in the contemporary, poststructural moment” (p. 17)? Validity, generalizability, and reliability are all rethought in light of this crisis. The crises of representation and legitimation shape the third crisis of praxis; “Is it possible to effect change in the world if society is only and always a text” (p. 17)? These questions will continue to shape the seventh moment of the future. They have without a doubt shaped the methods used in this study.

Although Denzin and Lincoln’s description of the history of qualitative research appears to be tidy and linear, they all exist simultaneously. Many moments in history continue to influence qualitative research today. This is particularly true in educational research, where a somewhat slower progression through the moments has not led directly to a sixth moment in which “fictional ethnographies, ethnographic poetry, and multimedia texts are today taken for granted” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 17). Recommendations of writers such as Lincoln and Denzin to become familiar with and utilize ideas from many different moments ring true for many but can leave researchers with the “agony and occasional nausea that those of us with post modernist tension

continue to suffer" (McWilliam, 1993, p. 199) as various methods pass in and out of favor. This tension is further exacerbated in my case, located as I am at the beginning of the X generation and educated in the postmodern intellectual climate of the 1980's completely outside the field of education in art, which has been very influenced by the post theories.

Although the history of educational research parallels the history of qualitative research, there are differences as well. As the social sciences were being formed as a separate, respectable discipline in the nineteenth century, theorists looked to the natural sciences for model frameworks. They adopted modernist theories, particularly positivism, to frame the social sciences. This was ironic, because at the same time that the social sciences were trying to become legitimate by adopting the objectivist framework of the natural sciences, the natural sciences were undergoing a paradigm shift away from objectivity (Skrtic, 1995a).

Educational theory, a branch of social science heavily influenced by academic psychology (Siegel & Fernandez, 2000), was dominated by modernist thought, particularly positivism and structuralism, in the twentieth century (Cherryholmes, 1988) and remains heavily influenced by it at the beginning of the twenty-first (Cherryholmes, 1999). Although by the 1960's the social sciences had slowly started to engage in the paradigm wars begun over a century ago in the natural sciences, education was "just beginning" (Skrtic, 1995) to join the fray in the mid-1990's.

In spite of educational theory's recent engagement in the paradigm wars, modernism continues to influence educational research. Skrtic (1995) categorizes modern social knowledge as follows: functionalism, radical structuralism, interpretivism, and

radical humanism. Lather (1991) expands Habermas' categories of human interest underscoring knowledge claims that set the purposes of research as prediction, understanding, and emancipation by adding the fourth category of deconstruction. Lather and Skrtic's paradigm maps have helped me locate who is doing what and for what reasons in educational research.

This poststructural ethnography has been influenced by each historical moment of qualitative research, particularly the sixth moment. Discussions of postmodern and poststructural theories that dominated the fifth moment led to the crises of representation, legitimation, and praxis that this dissertation exemplifies. In the fifth moment of qualitative research, much effort was spent discussing postmodern and poststructural theories. Many people have asked, "what is poststructural theory?" Poststructuralists often respond that it's not so much what it is, as what it does (and does not do). It is not a philosophy, but a variety of critiques, such as deconstruction (Derrida & Caputo, 1997), and archaeology (Foucault, 1973). Poststructural theory is primarily a tool whose function is to "critique, interrupt, and reinscribe normative, hegemonic, and exclusionary ideologies and practices" (St.Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 3). It is not a theory with a uniform set of shared assumptions, but a loose association of thinkers who draw upon a variety of sources (St.Pierre, 2000). It "helps us ask questions about what we have not thought to think" (Lather, 1991), "to deconstruct not only traditional views but also critically oriented perspectives" (Capper, 1998).

Poststructural theory framed this study from the beginning through data collection, analysis, interpretation, and finally, representation. It has effectively troubled both my thinking and the process of completing this dissertation. What draws me to this

complicated/complicating loose association of thinkers, this tool? Poststructuralism's understanding of discourse helps to disrupt the construct of children with biological defects and replaces those students with children who have been written into place the functionalist discourse. It allows me to work at creating my own discourse, *our* own discourse. It opens up opportunities to think of how the discourse of schooling-as-usual was produced rather than settling on blind acceptance. It allows me to think of different questions to ask and things to say, to "look awry" (Zizek, 1991, p. 3) at something that is labeled "broken," to raise "serious moral and political questions about the practices and discourses of the field of special education, given that it is the principal human science that modern industrialized societies use to define normality in schools and, after establishing this standard, to constitute as subjects those students who deviate from it" (Skrtic, 1995b, p. 42). It encourages me to practice teaching as a subversive act (hooks, 1994).

New conceptions of power, resistance and freedom allow me to think about the power circulating in relationships (Foucault, 1971/1972). Poststructural theory helps me rethink my fear of losing power, of having no power, since power is not something I have, but something that circulates in relationships. It helps me rethink discipline into creating opportunities for resistance. "The space of freedom available to us is not at all insignificant, and we have the ability to analyze, contest, and change practices that are being used to construct ourselves and the world, as well as the practices we ourselves are using in this work of praxis" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 493). I am multitudes of tiny war machines, a nomad looking to hold on to my smooth space.

Poststructuralism's siren is the call to deconstruction. It gives me permission to tear apart, rework, build up, smack headlong into new structures and begin again. I find relief in finding a label for this tendency that celebrates the way that I think. I have a tool to use to break up paralyzing sadness, guilt, to push up and out of the ruts of wallowing despair. It demands challenge, an order: to not get comfortable, complacent, smug. Postructuralism forces me to go back the other direction and to work recursively. Rather than being trapped in the linearity of functionalism, I am granted permission to think from the middles, trace thoughts out to their natural conclusions, then use those conclusions as the middles and start again (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

For me it has been difficult to use an academic voice without positioning myself as the expert who found the correct interpretation of the data. After reading a draft of chapter five, my peer reviewer needed, “how can you be so sure – this is only your reading.” My first analysis was not really a poststructural reading of the data. Although I had tried to look at my data through a poststructural lens, humanism shaped what I saw. I had to use the “conclusions” I made to start over. I had to look at those conclusions again, through different eyes. Neither way of looking was “right” (or wrong), but I had to rethink how I came to see what I did in my classroom as the right way to do things.

Research Design

Having located this study in the sixth moment of qualitative inquiry, I now move forward to discuss the methods used and how my theoretical framework influenced the selection of those methods. A linear timeline would not give the reader a sense of what I did when, or why I did so. Because of this, I chose to use Janesick’s (2000) metaphor comparing qualitative research design to choreography in order to clarify my study

design. This metaphor divides the research process into three stages: 1.) Warming Up and Preparation: Design Decisions at the Beginning of the Study and Elements for Choreography; 2.) Exploration and Exercises – Design Decisions Throughout the Study and Choreography as a Work in Process; and 3.) Cooling Down: Illumination and Formulation – Design Decisions Made at the End of the Study. I use these three stages to organize the following description regarding study design.

Warming Up: Initial Design Decisions

This is a poststructural ethnography of a middle school self-contained SLD classroom. When this study began, I wanted to better understand the ways that students engaged in opportunities for literacy development and their resistance to being subjected both as disabled and illiterate within school discourses and as literate and abled within classroom discourses. My inquiry focused on the culture of a particular classroom and, thus, was also an inquiry into relationships between students, their teacher, the curriculum, and the larger school context.

The purpose of the research was twofold. First, I wanted to describe practices that would provide others an opportunity to see themselves reflected in the common experiences that teachers and students share regardless of their placements and labels, practices such as keeping students on task, reading lessons, and writing exercises. To describe such experiences, I needed methods of inquiry that would allow me to examine what was going on in the classroom day-by-day and represent those findings in ways that would ring true with many different types of teachers and learners. Second, I also wanted to describe transgressive experiences in my own classroom that I believed worked to reduce the alienation and isolation of being located on the margins and opened up

possibilities for students to be subjected as literate and able. To do this, I needed methods of inquiry that would shake things up, encourage new ways of looking at the same old stories, and encourage the readers of my study to join me in thinking of things differently.

My goal of opening up literacy opportunities for students positioned as disabled led to a desire to deconstruct what I thought of as the typical special education experience, including teacher beliefs and behaviors, curricula, and student outcomes common to that experience. I saw the first step of such a deconstruction as troubling the operating binaries of regular ed/special ed, able/disabled, and literate/illiterate. I had read many reports, journal articles, and books that described instruction in special education settings as substandard, harmful to students, and an impediment to literacy learning. I saw my efforts to make my own classroom practice exemplary as deconstructive. The first step of this deconstruction involved my efforts to separate myself – and my classroom (and therefore my students) - from the status quo that existed both in my own perceptions and in the perceptions of others about special educators and special education placement as perpetuators of poor outcomes for students.

This first deconstructive move was made instinctively, tacitly, and without the language of poststructural theory to help me figure out what was going on and the ways that others (students, teachers, administrators) interpreted and responded to such a move. I wanted to know what new opportunities for literacy development might come from such a move, and how students might respond to those opportunities. I was also counting on poststructural theory to help sustain me in my deconstructive quest.

Although the first step of deconstruction appeared quite simple – to reverse the binary of regular ed/special ed in a way that special ed became the privileged term, the

powerful discourses of both regular and special education made such a reversal problematic. I wanted to use poststructural theory to help me understand how discourses work to position students as able or disabled, literate or illiterate, and how students might move about more freely in the power relationships that work to subject them in a certain way. I wanted to look at student resistance to subjectification, particularly how discourses could help subject students as “getting it right” as readers and writers. What I needed was a method with which to do so, and that is what I begin to outline here.

While my first deconstructive move was to try and “flip” my classroom into a privileged space, it takes more than just saying it to make it so. I was not in a position to overthrow the educational system as we know it in order to create my own new space to develop the new situations that Derrida (1967/1974) discusses when he describes deconstruction. My work, then, became an example of doing it and troubling it at the same time, a never-ending task that required explicit rather than tacit knowledge of how the discourses of our classroom and school would serve to keep the binaries flipping like the pirate ship ride at the state fair, often leaving us to wonder if we would someday spin all the way round.

I had known for a long time that the ideas and questions that intrigued me did not make sense within the discourse of functionalism. Skrtic (1995) describes functionalism in the following long quote:

The functionalist or micro-objective paradigm is grounded in the sociology of regulation, takes a microscopic view of social reality, and approaches social science from an objectivist point of view. Given its realist ontology and deterministic view of human nature, functionalism

assumes a single social reality to which humans react mechanistically.

Moreover, given its positivist epistemology and preference for nomothetic methodologies, it assumes that, by employing the methods of the natural sciences, social science can, over time, represent this reality objectively and thus predict and control the way humans react to it. (p. 67)

Functionalism presupposes that there is one social reality, and that it is rational and objective. Social problems, then, must be pathological in the functionalist worldview. Questions such as how students respond to opportunities for literacy development don't make sense within the discourse of functionalism that predicts and controls how students would react.

Although I had known that functionalist theories would not help me answer the issues that puzzled me, I slowly began to understand that my questions didn't make sense within the discourse of constructivism either. To better understand how students' experiences fit into traditional stories of school and at the same time marked them as different, I looked to poststructural understandings of the subject, discourse, power and resistance, and how poststructuralism can lead to new ways of thinking about normalization, containment, and agency.

While I was interested in deconstructing special education, I wanted to do this in a particular context, for particular students. I did not want to deconstruct an abstract concept or create a straw man to attack, nor did I want to critique someone else's practice across the paradigm divide. Without knowing exactly what stories would emerge in an ethnography of a special education classroom, I had no illusions that they would all be positive. Documenting conflicting stories would be important, but I was unsure how to

get past the “cover stories” (Connelly & Clandinin) of another teacher and how I would handle the ethics of analyzing another person’s practice through a lens that they might not subscribe to. By implementing a constructivist curriculum in my own classroom, I felt that I was onto something important, but by no means had I found a magic bullet. I believed that by studying my own students, I could minimize the disruption of classroom routines and experiences, have a mind’s-eye view of a teacher attempting to use the curriculum to open up opportunities for literacy development, and avoid a perhaps too easy critique of someone else’s practice by focusing on my own.

The decision to conduct research in my own classroom stemmed from a desire to apply poststructural theory, often criticized for having little practical application, to a real live situation I perceived as cracked or broken. In order to facilitate both my research and my students' opportunities for literacy development, I also chose to teach the same group of children two years in a row. In the large urban school system in which I have taught for almost ten years, this is not common practice. Both student enrollment and teacher placement change frequently, often several times during the school year. My experiences in this system have reflected such transience; since entering the system in 1992, I have served in eleven different positions at eight different schools.

Teaching the self-contained class for two consecutive years facilitated my research in several ways. This was a new position for me, and it took most of the first semester of the 1999-2000 academic year to grasp who the students were as individuals, their achievement levels in the classroom setting, how they came together as a group, and which strategies and structures might allow them to succeed and grow academically. By

the time formal data collection began in the spring of 2000, I had developed relationships with the students that increased their willingness to participate in the study.

The length of time I spent in the field of my classroom also allowed me time to collect rich data, reflect on the data collected, and try out various analyses as the study unfolded. In this way the study was not only grounded in practice but also influenced practice as well. This helped fulfill my desire to describe and deconstruct literacy practices.

Not only did I believe that teaching the same group of students for two years would facilitate my research, I also thought it would help my students. It seemed that they were just beginning to make progress in reading and writing when suddenly the 1999-2000 school year was over. There were many procedures I implemented in the spring of 2000 that I wanted to continue the next year, as well as strategies, structures, and ideas I had not been able to try. I was encouraged that many students had made over two years' gain in some aspects of reading and writing, but I was saddened that several remained below a second grade level. When class projections for the 2000-2001 school year were distributed in the spring of 2000, I realized I would have a smaller group of students and fewer behavior problems. The research that suggests older emergent-level readers and writers make substantial progress in the second consecutive year of instruction in constructivist learning environments (Englert & Mariage, 1998) provided the final impetus to sign my contract to return for the 2000-2001 school year.

While I remained in the same position for two consecutive school years, this study covered only a portion of that time. Data collection for the dissertation study began in the spring of 2000, following a brief pilot study earlier in the 1999-2000 academic year. Data

analysis began in the summer of 2000, and data collection and analysis continued through the fall of 2000 with data collection ending in the first week of January 2001. Thus, data collection took place in two academic years (1999-2000 and 2000-2001), for a period of roughly one calendar year (2000).

Site of the Research: Southside Middle School in the Year 2000

The context of this study was a self-contained SLD classroom at Southside Middle School, which is located in a large urban area in the southeastern United States. Southside is part of the public city-county school system. Mathachs County includes rural farmland as well as urban and suburban areas. Beaches, wetlands, and the historic district's urban forest create a diverse landscape. Mathachs County's population is diverse as well. Asian immigrants, Hispanic laborers, African Americans, descendents of city founders and Gullah tribes, soldiers stationed at nearby military bases, professional transplants and retirees all live, work and play side by side. In a city that is 60% Black, there are two institutions that have resisted integration: places of worship and the public schools.

Southside Middle School is one of ten middle schools in Mathachs County. It is located on a largely commercial street. A mall, large park, restaurants, grocery stores, K-Mart, movie rental stores, apartment complexes, churches, and day care facilities are close by. The school attendance zone covers a large area, and includes residences within walking distance, a gated community on a nearby island, and parts of the downtown area. Homeless students living in hotels and shelters also fall into the Southside district.

During the 1999-2000 school year (the most recent year such data was available and the year in which this study began), 911 students attended Southside. Black students

made up the largest ethnic group with 544, or 60% of the student body, with 321, or 35% White, and 46, or 5% either Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, or multi-racial. Slightly more of the students were male (53%) while 48% were female. A variety of educational programs were available, including gifted education (6% of the student population), alternative programs (2% of the student population), and special education (14% of the student population). Southside had no Title I Program, although students there had received Title I services in the past and will receive them again during the 2000-2001 school year. Almost half (48%) of the student body was eligible for free/reduced lunches.

During the course of this study, approximately fifty students at Southside were taught in self-contained special education classrooms. A student labeled “self-contained” receives special education services for four or more hours per school day. Although there are a variety of ways that such students may be taught, the participants in this study were pulled from the regular education classroom and assigned to one classroom for six 45-minute segments per day for instruction in the core academic areas of reading, language arts, math, science and social studies. Self-contained students attended homeroom, lunch, and exploratory classes such as art and physical education with their regular education peers. Students with an academic strength attended regular education classes in those subjects.

Mathachs County adopted block scheduling for all middle schools during the 1999-2000 school year. Students attend four 90-minute blocks: Math, Reading and Language Arts, Science and Social Studies, and Exploratory. This resulted in scheduling problems for students labeled Resource SLD. Resource students typically receive special education services in one or two academic areas. Prior to the implementation of block

scheduling, resource students were often served in 50-minute segments in areas such as reading, writing, or math. Block scheduling increased instructional time in math to 90 minutes and combined language arts and reading into one 90-minute block. For resource students with deficits in math and written expression, block scheduling resulted in as much time spent in special education as students labeled self-contained. Clearly, this was problematic since program guidelines are federally mandated. Similar problems resulted when students in the self-contained class were served in the general classroom for mathematics. These students, although labeled self-contained, were only served in the SLD classroom for 180 minutes per day. Block scheduling forced special education teachers to rethink what makes labels such as “self-contained” and “resource” appropriate. Was it the subjects a student was to be served in or the grade levels at which they performed? The traditional method of looking solely at segments served became inappropriate. Was a segment forty-five minutes or sixty? How could sixty minutes segments be taught within a 90-minute block? How should students with severe deficits in writing who read on grade level be taught in the context of a combined reading/language arts class?

There were no easy answers to these questions, nor was the answer the same for each student. At Southside, resource and self-contained SLD teachers determined that students who performed above a third grade level should be taught by resource teachers, while those who performed below that level would be taught in the self-contained classroom. Resource teachers then decided which students would benefit from being taught in a special education classroom and which would be taught with support in the regular education classroom. Although this was developed as a general plan, scheduling

problems resulted in a few resource students being taught in the self-contained classroom while some self-contained students were served in the resource room. Any students with learning disabilities who needed to be taught science and social studies in a special education setting were served in the self-contained classroom.

The enrollment of Southside's self-contained SLD class was in constant flux over both the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 school years. Although a self-contained LD teacher's caseload is limited by state law to 16 students with one paraprofessional, the caseload was at 17 students for the majority of the 1999-2000 school year and at one point reached 20 students. The quarter structure of the school year led to transitions each marking period as placement meetings were held and students transferred between special education programs and regular education settings. Two students transferred from other schools near the beginning of the fourth marking period. Four students joined the class from other states over the course of the year.

At the beginning of the 2000-2001 school year, the self-contained SLD classroom was split into two classrooms of seven students. The SLD paraprofessional worked with each class for half the school day. During the first nine-week grading period, students transferring from other schools and resource placements resulted in an increase in enrollment in the self-contained classes. In addition to self-contained students officially on my caseload, I also taught any resource SLD students taking social studies or science in a pull-out setting and two students with emotional/behavior disorders (EBD's).

Scheduling and enrollment concerns such as those described above can be problematic for several reasons. Large special education class sizes have been shown to reduce the amount of individualization and to negatively impact quality of instruction

(Moody et. al, 2000). Ongoing turnover of students in the self-contained classroom disrupted relationships between teachers and students. Consistency in academic and behavioral expectations was difficult to achieve as students moved between teachers and placements. Paperwork demands that accompanied transitions cut into planning and instructional time. Resources were not provided to meet the needs of students scheduled into the classroom above the legal limit. There was at times a range of over eight grade levels in literacy skills in the self-contained classroom, a situation that did not feel very special. These concerns led to my desire to better understand the practices of my students and deconstruct their experiences.

Selection of Participants: Spring 2000

While I wanted to better understand the ways that students engaged in opportunities for literacy development and their resistance to subjection within classroom and school discourses, I recognized that trying to collect and analyze data for every student would not be practical. Even if I had wanted to take on such a task, many students were unwilling to participate. In the spring of the 1999-2000 school year, I explained to my class that I would be doing some research for a course I was taking. My plan for this course was to conduct a pilot study, which evolved into the dissertation study. Four students, Colby, Jennifer, Michael, and Ramon, agreed to be focal informants. These students are both typical of students in self-contained LD classes and representative of the diversity of such students. Information about the four focal informants is presented in Table 1.

There were a number of factors that influenced their selection as participants. For example, at the onset of the study conducted for my research class, I explained some of

the techniques I wanted to use for data collection and passed out consent and assent forms. My pool of subjects was immediately reduced as one of the more powerful students loudly claimed disinterest. Several other students also said they would not participate and gave back the forms. Others, however, became excited and wanted to know more about the study. One of those students, Ramon, eagerly signed his assent form, returned it and took home his parental consent form, self-selecting to participate as a focal informant. Colby, Jennifer, and Michael seemed ambivalent about participating, but I was interested in their being focal informants and later asked them individually if they would participate. All three gave a response indicating that they would if I wanted them to. I then spoke with their parents during conferences and obtained consent. The students' signing of assent forms followed this. As the pilot study evolved into the dissertation study, a new proposal was submitted to the Human Subjects Review Board at my university in June of 2000 regarding data collection to occur in the fall. On returning to school, I discovered that Ramon had moved away over the summer. I met with Colby, Jennifer, and Michael, explained what their continued participation would entail, and read the assent forms. They readily agreed to participate. Data collected during the spring of 2000 contained many videotaped class sessions, field note entries, and work samples related to Ramon that continued to inform data analysis and interpretation. Since half of

Table 1

Demographic Information For Focal Informants, January 2000

Students		Indicators
Colby		
Grade	6	
Gender	Male	
Race	White	
Years in Special Education	6	
Years in Self-Contained Programs	4	
Reading Decoding Grade Level	K	
Reading Comprehension Grade Level	1	
Written Expression Grade Level	1	
Math Calculation Grade Level	3	
Program(s) Served	SLD	
Jennifer		
Grade	7	
Gender	Female	
Race	Multi-Racial	
Years in Special Education	10	
Years in Self-Contained Programs	10	
Reading Decoding Grade Level	4	
Reading Comprehension Grade Level	3	
Written Expression Grade Level	3	
Math Calculation Grade Level	3	
Program(s) Served	SLD	

Michael

Grade	7
Gender	Male
Race	Black
Years in Special Education	10
Years in Self-Contained Programs	10
Reading Decoding Grade Level	Preprimer
Reading Comprehension Grade Level	Preprimer
Written Expression Grade Level	2
Math Calculation Grade Level	4
Program(s) Served	Other Health Impaired, Speech

Ramon

Grade	7
Gender	Male
Race	Hispanic
Years in Special Education	UK
Years in Self-Contained Programs	UK
Reading Decoding Grade Level	4
Reading Comprehension Grade Level	3
Written Expression Grade Level	3
Math Calculation Grade Level	5
Program(s) Served	SLD

the data were collected during the spring of 2000 and this data played a significant role in analysis, I continued to consider Ramon a focal informant in the study.

Several factors led to my interest in the four focal students. Michael and Jennifer first interested me because they remained mysterious even after I had worked with them for eight hours a day over the entire school year. The full extent of Michael's reading problems remained concealed for the first quarter of the 1999-2000 school year, while Jennifer's comprehension and writing behaviors puzzled me for the duration of the study. Both of these students are labeled language disordered yet had a special relationship with one another and were capable of sophisticated work when completing tasks together. They had both been in special education programs since preschool and could be considered two of the most severely disabled members of the class.

Colby caught my attention initially by being so different from his older brother who was also a student in my class for most of the 1999-2000 school year. Inattentive and unmotivated the first nine weeks, Colby came alive with changes in the curriculum. The contrast between Colby as non-reader and writer and Colby as researcher and report writer made me wonder who else might have been lurking inside each of my students that I was unable to see.

An important factor in the choice of each of the four students centered on relationships. Ramon and I had a special relationship. He stayed after school to work on projects, I talked to his mother and encouraged her to let him continue to live in Mathachs County rather than with his father, and I talked to him on the telephone when school was not in session. I felt that Ramon and I understood each other and that more

than any other student he understood what I was trying to do with the curriculum. Ramon reminded me of myself in some ways, and there were many times he seemed almost to humor me as he conformed to classroom expectations. Our relationship may also have led to Ramon's self-selection. Michael and Jennifer had a relationship with one another in that they often worked as if they were two synchronized components of a single unit. Colby maintained strong relationships with kin and community while also building relationships with the curriculum. This appeared to require sophisticated negotiation as family and learning problems sometimes threatened to overwhelm him.

Poststructural Ethnography

The crises of representation, legitimation and praxis that are the focus of the sixth moment lead to many tensions and point to many issues. "These two crises speak, respectively, to the Other and its representation in our texts and to the authority we claim for our texts" (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994 p. 576). In trying to define who is Other and how to include the Other in social science, researchers have used a variety of strategies that have come to be known by many names, including messy texts (Marcus, 1994), new ethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 1996), and experimental texts, confessional, dramatic, critical, and self- or auto-ethnography (Van Maanen, 1995). These forms of representation disrupt notions of research texts as accurate, true, or complete, and have led to new conceptions of reliability and validity (Lather, 1993; Scheurich, 1996).

There is no concise definition for a poststructural ethnography; it is this type of conciseness the term is in reaction against. My conceptualization of a poststructural ethnography includes textual experimentation, a focus on the research process itself, and obliteration of the customary and mannerly distinction between researcher and researched

(VanMaanen, 1995). Poststructural ethnography puts the interlocutor into the account and makes the tension that comes with interaction and negotiation between researcher and participant explicit (Beverly, 2000). Poststructural ethnography is a cobbling together of

Stories we may tell each other, some to share our profoundest links with those whom we studied; some to help us see how we can right a wrong or relieve oppression; some to help us and others to understand how and why we did what we did, and how it all went very wrong; and some simply to sing of difference. (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994, p. 584)

Although there are many deep, theoretical, and serious reasons underlying experimental forms of writing in poststructural research, they should not be thought of as simply a new set of "rules" we must follow as we scramble to keep up with "galloping theory" (McWilliam, 1993). I do not deny that the writing of this study brought me pleasure as well as pain. If part of what poststructural theory does for me includes fluidity and play, play and pleasure, and the joys of childlike associations, the writing of those associations becomes a part of that play. Crisis is not meant to connote only disaster.

Why a nontraditional representation for this dissertation, the most traditional of assignments? My data and the insights I was coming to simply would not fit into a traditional linear format. To have stuffed them into one would have perhaps been possible, but the pieces that were severed or sprung out would have been lost forever.

I am not unique in my quest for appropriate representation(s). Like many others, I consider representation to be an issue of politics, ethics, and validity. Although I wanted to write a dissertation that allowed readers an "insider's view" of a classroom on the margins, I shared concerns similar to those of Lather (2000b) as she describes the

rationale behind her choices regarding representation in her book *Troubling the Angels: Women Living with HIV/AIDS*:

Irreducible to the terms of the real, its insistent move is from voice to inscription, from notions of the intrinsic to ideas of the frame. Refusing textual innocence and an untroubled realism, representation is practiced as a way to intervene, even while one's confidence is troubled. Here the task becomes to operate from a textual rather than a referential notion of representation in working the ruins of a confident social science. This is deconstruction "after the turn," in what Spivak calls its "'setting-to-work' mode" that carries a greater emphasis on ethics and politics (par. 51).

My concern with representation echoes Lather's. I did not wish to create a text in which the reader gets lost, identifying with the characters without stepping back and out to analyze what is going on, to question what has been left out by the inclusion of particular stories. I wanted to walk the line between leaving my reader hopelessly lost, and mapping the terrain so clearly that no ambiguity is left. I did find answers to the research questions posed in Chapter One of this study, but I do not pretend that they are the only answers. I wanted my representation to reflect this multiplicity of possible answers.

Many of my "answers" are stories of resistance. Richardson (1997) writes of the potential dangers of resistance narratives. In a study that questions resistant practices written by one who has a tendency to privilege narrative too much, this danger becomes quite real.

Stories written as resistance narratives...are weak representations: reactive stories that keep alive the dominant culture in the psyches of the

nondominant, and stories that continue to materially profit the dominant, because the dominant is the text and/or subtext of the work....How then can we re-present lives? How can we write lives so that our writing has mattered? (Richardson, 1997, pp. 78-80)

Richardson and Lather have provided compelling reasons to experiment with different forms of representation. Their writing inspired me as I looked at how students are positioned by the dominant discourses of school, and envisioned ways that new discourses might work to position them differently.

Methods of Data Collection

I had decided to study my own classroom, conceptualized the study as a poststructural ethnography, and had four students who were willing to participate. I next had to consider what type of data to collect. I would need rich data if I wanted to show the ways that the students were the same as any student as well as how they were always already marked as different. I wanted the data collection process to be congruent with my practice as a teacher and open up literacy opportunities. I saw data collection not only as a way to describe what was going on in the classroom, but to shape what was going on as well. These were tough objectives to meet. In the end, I selected participant observation in conjunction with videotaping and document analysis as the most appropriate methods of data collection for a poststructural ethnography of a self-contained SLD classroom.

Participant Observation. The current moment of qualitative research questions whether objectivity is a worthwhile goal or even possible. Long a primary method of ethnography, participant observation takes on new meanings within poststructural ethnography. While ethnographers in the first half of the 20th century subscribed to the

typology of complete observer, participant-as-observer, and complete participant (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000) with complete observer favored and complete participant a role which was highly suspect, in the sixth moment this typology has been rethought. Researcher immersion in the culture under study is now considered acceptable and even desirable. My role in this study was one of complete-member researcher. This category of researchers is “composed of those who study settings in which they are already members or with which they become fully affiliated in the course of research” (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000, p. 677). A study rooted in rationalist, functionalist theory would require a researcher who remained objective, who impacted the learning environment to the least degree possible. This study, however, based in constructivist and poststructural theories, was interested not only in students’ creation of and response to classroom discourses but my own as well.

In this study, participant observation was essentially unavoidable as I was first and foremost a participant in the research setting: my primary role in the classroom was that of teacher. While I was there I observed what occurred, both as a teacher trying to make instructional decisions and as a researcher trying to describe and think about how particular practices and discourses positioned students in particular ways. As a full-member participant observer, I had access to many settings, activities, and people in the course of performing my job responsibilities of special education teacher. Although I did not conduct formal interviews as a part of this study, I had opportunities to ask the focal students questions informally in the course of the school day as well as in the context of various academic tasks. In a similar way, I had the opportunity to speak with parents during IEP meetings and conferences and on field trips. While I did talk with parents

about their children and ask them questions, this did not take place in a formal interview setting.

As part of the observation process, I wrote various types of texts, including narratives recorded in a computerized journal and email messages to friends, colleagues, and professors, also written in narrative form. Polkinghorne (1995) describes narrative inquiry as “a subset of qualitative research designs in which stories are used to describe human action” (p. 1). He explains the broadening definition of what constitutes a narrative:

The meaning of *narrative* as prosaic text has been extended to refer to any data that are in the natural form of discourse or speech....in this general extension of the term, *narrative* becomes synonymous with the primary linguistic expressions that make up qualitative research projects; it is used to refer to the data form of field notes or original interview data and their written transcriptions....In this context, *story* refers not only to fictional accounts but also to narratives describing "ideal" life events such as biographies, autobiographies, histories, case studies, and reports of remembered episodes that have occurred (Polkinghorne, 1995, pp. 6-7)

My long standing interest in teacher stories (Bowles, 1999) and their connection to reflexive practice and research influences the way that I experience and record information. It is now recognized that "social science interviews are [not] the only occasions in which personal narratives are produced or from which such data may be culled...stories are told, experiences are shared, and similar kinds of performances are enacted as part and parcel of everyday life" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 75). Narratives

have a unique role in the documentation of human action, interpersonal relationships, and chance happenings as well as the ability to communicate the practices and structures that cultures are built of to diverse audiences. Narrative structure also has the potential to be more easily understood by those engaging in peer debriefing and member checking of data representations.

Narratives provide researchers with opportunities to make their role in data collection more explicit. "In the conduct of narrative inquiry there is open recognition that the researcher is collaboratively constructing the narrator's reality, not just passively recording and reporting" (Marshall & Rossman, p. 87). In this study I was a complete-member researcher. Narrative forms allowed for both the "recording [of] stories as they occur during participant observation in a research setting" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 56) and recognition that researcher subjectivity affects data collection. Narrative inquiry fits with poststructuralism's call to view individuals and research settings from multiple viewpoints and to make researcher epistemologies more explicit; has been described as "particularly useful in developing feminist and critical theory" (Marshall & Rossman, 19xx, p. 87); and is gaining ground in a number of disciplines, including literacy research (Alvermann, 2000a).

Narrative, however, is problematic in poststructural work. Central to both constructivism and poststructuralism is a critique of privileging experience without analyzing the structures that produced it. Narrative accounts too often do just that. If language does not reflect meaning but rather constructs it, poststructural theories help to go 'behind' the narration to consider what it is that structures and dissolves particular meanings and at what cost. What cannot be said

because of what is said is of interest. Part of the focus, then, is on the instabilities of meaning in discourse and with how discourses govern and produce meaning (Britzman, 1994, p. 73).

The need to balance intelligibility of the analysis by a wide range of people, including the focal informants, with the desire to get behind what is said (and not said) to look at how discourses produce and are produced is an ongoing tension in this study.

Recognizing the potential of narrative to support unity and closure, Clough (1998) recommends combining narrative with other technologies such as images, voices, and events. This dissertation both utilizes and troubles narrative conventions by combining multiple writing spaces, nontraditional forms of representation, juxtaposition of narrative and analysis, and images, talk, and writings produced by the focal informants.

My responsibilities as teacher made the traditional observation typology of complete observer, participant-as-observer, and complete participant outlined by Angrosino & Mays de Perez (2000) problematic. While such typologies encourage ignoring irrelevant details and becoming more focused on aspects of the culture important to research goals, I continued to (attempt to) observe everything that was going on in an effort to improve instruction. Of primary focus in this study was to look at practices that I understood tacitly as deconstructive and make what was or was not deconstructive about them explicit. To do this, I had to theorize experience. In other words, I had to first become aware of the discourses at work around us, what they allowed us to say and do and what they did not. I then had to analyze those experiences in an effort to find out more about the structures producing those discourses. As a complete-member researcher,

I combined participant observation with several other types of data collection in order to further understand classroom events.

Documents. A second method I used both to help narrow my focus and expand my understanding of student practices was the collection of documents. Collection of documents gave me a way into what was going on in the classroom that wasn't always possible as I interacted with students. Work samples documenting literate practices, a popular type of researcher-generated document in classroom based studies (Allen, 1995; Krogness, 1995; Fedele, 1996; Hynds, 1997; Michie, 1997), provided a way of looking at traces of literate behavior students left behind. Work samples also showed how well students got it right as learners – good students do written work and do it well. Work samples included journal entries, web pages, and various types of student-generated products resulting from class assignments.

Another type of document collected during the study included public documents. Public documents, or records, "involve a full state technology of power [and are] prepared to attest to some formal transaction" (Hodder, 1994, p. 393). Numerous sources of public documents exist in relation to the county, school system, and focal informants, including federal, state, and private agency reports and individualized education plans (IEP's). In this study, I collected state, system, and school level statistics and reports, as well as educational records of the four focal participants. Student educational records included IEP's, psychological reports, and program eligibility reports.

Several types of purposeful sampling methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) were used to collect documents. Theoretical sampling was used to collect work samples and public documents throughout the duration of the study. With theoretical sampling,

the researcher begins with the selection of several incidents, events, or chunks of data that may be compared and contrasted. They are chosen for their relevance to the theoretical domain designated for study. During the early phases of data collection and analysis, these chunks are chosen for similarity. During later phases, they are chosen to highlight differences.

(Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 252)

Student records provided rich examples of the discourse of special education and how such a discourse affects every aspect of students' education. These records document the educational history of each student, in some cases, spanning ten years or more. Work samples also provide many examples of students' literate practices. Every student in the self-contained classroom came with records and produced work samples. Focal informants' records were duplicated in their entirety, and originally all work samples were collected for the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 school years. Analysis of the data, described below, resulted in selection of incidents, events, and work samples around particular themes.

There were numerous benefits to collecting documents as data. Documents collected for this study were a product of the classroom context and grounded in the real world, bringing high theory in direct contact with lived experience. Documents provided information otherwise unavailable, and provided information that focal informants were unable to share due to difficulties with verbal communication and language in one-on-one situations such as interviews (Merriam, 1998); "many areas of experience are hidden from language, particularly subordinate experience" (Hodder, 1994, p. 395). Document collection and analysis also had a minimum impact on the research setting, and allowed

me to determine "where the greatest emphasis lies after the data have been gathered" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 86).

Collecting a wide variety of documents complemented my desire to examine experience poststructurally. The study of many types of documents and classroom artifacts provided one way of getting into the multi-voiced, culturally inscribed and contradictory subject-in-process. Hodder (1994) discusses document interpretation after the postmodern turn:

As Derrida has shown, meaning does not reside in a text but in the writing and reading of it. As the text is reread in different contexts it is given new meanings, often contradictory and always socially embedded...texts can be used alongside other forms of evidence so that the particular biases of each can be understood and compared. The problem is one of situating material culture within varying contexts while at the same time entering into a dialectic relationship between those contexts and the context of the analyst...material traces of behavior give an important and different insight from that provided by any number of questionnaires. (Hodder, 1994, p. 394)

Videotapes. While work samples and public records presented linguistic information, videotaped class sessions aimed to connect linguistic with nonverbal data. Videotaping focal informants' interactions with tasks and each other documented what occurred as I circulated around the classroom as well as student behaviors in informal, nonacademic settings.

I had originally hoped to use audio recordings for this purpose after reading a study in which teachers analyzed audiotapes in study groups (Ballenger, 1999). The following quote resonated with my experiences, and I grew excited at the idea of using such a strategy in my own classroom to improve the quality of both my research and instruction:

The first value of this approach is what it does to time. I think all teachers would agree that the normal pace of the classroom defies reflection; ‘stir[ring] a giant cauldron’ all day is how one of our members described teaching (Phillips, 1990, p. 38). With the tape recorder we create texts that allow us to stop the relentless pace of the school day and think about what has happened, and what has been said, again. (p. 84)

After a trial run, however, it was immediately apparent that the discourse style that dominated our classroom interactions did not lend itself to successful audiotaping. What I had remembered as a fairly orderly lesson sounded on tape to be a chaotic event with children and adults talking simultaneously, cutting in on each other, and sometimes escalating into shouting matches. Often I could not tell who was saying what or even what had been said.

The preliminary audiotape also made obvious the importance of nonverbal information to our communication. There were frequent bursts of giggles that didn’t seem related to anything that had been said, stretches of tape with no talk, and sounds of movement. Videotaping combined the time-stopping benefits of audiotaping with visual information, helping to contextualize the data as well as clarify how participants interacted with tasks, the teacher, and each other. Videotapes helped me observe what

was occurring when I wasn't interacting with focal students and activities I was unaware of at the time. Viewing the videotaped data helped me look at things differently than I had perceived them as they were occurring and provided a way into the often hidden worlds of adolescents. They also revealed aspects of how relationships worked and framed our interactions.

While records and work samples were collected using theoretical sampling techniques, videotapes of class sessions were collected using opportunity and digressive sampling. Opportunity sampling "documents unanticipated or poorly understood phenomena as they occur" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 91), while digressive sampling involves "deliberate searching beyond the obvious to the novel, to the places and events that are usually outside typical public recognition" (p. 91). Both of these methods are recognized as having intuitive components, and have great potential for documenting practices and structures that serve to deconstruct students' positionings. Examples of opportunity samples include videotapes made as students worked on computers in the classroom and computer lab. Digressive sampling occurred during informal, nonacademic times such as field trips, the last day of school, and class parties. These videotapes represent digressions from the daily routine and document aspects of adolescent culture typically outside of adult, particularly teacher, awareness.

The majority of videotape data was collected during the 1999-2000 school year. In the first stages of analysis that occurred in the summer of 2000, I noticed the students' discomfort with being videotaped. Although each focal informant had signed assent forms indicating that they were willing to be taped, their behavior on the videotapes suggested otherwise. Students who did not choose to participate, although not actively

taped, were also made uncomfortable by the presence of the camera. An exception to this discomfort were student-made tapes filmed during field trips. Students continued to make such tapes, and I continued to collect student-made tapes for further analysis.

The use of videotapes as data is becoming more commonplace, particularly in studies of constructivist curricula. Ricki Goldman-Segall, who defines herself as a “digital ethnographer” (1998a; 1998b), uses digital video technology in her research on technology-enhanced constructivist pedagogy at the Multimedia Ethnographic Research Lab based at the University of British Columbia. My use of video data echoes Goldman-Segall’s work with data collected by both researchers and participants described in the following quote:

I recommend that cameras and computer-based media technologies be used by researchers, teachers, and young people in less constrained and more informal ways. Young people are the best "informants" we have of what is happening in schools. It is they and their families, friends, and communities who build the curriculum in the classrooms. (Goldman-Segall, 1998a, par. 16)

Franks and Jewitt’s (2001) study on the social action of teachers and students in science classrooms utilized videotape data to investigate visual and nonverbal modes of making meaning. Methods of data collection were based on a large-scale study of multimodal science classrooms (Jewitt et al., 2001) and included multiple viewings of videotapes with image only, sound only, and both image and sound. Videotapes of class sessions were supplemented with observation, work samples, materials used in the lessons, and videotaped focus group interviews.

Exploration and Exercises – Design Decisions Throughout the Study

Before researchers devote themselves to the arduous and significant time commitments of qualitative studies, it is a good idea for them to do some background work, or what I have called “stretching exercises.”

Stretching exercises allow prospective qualitative researchers to practice interview, observation, writing, reflection, and artistic skills to refine their research instruments, which are the researchers themselves. (Janesick, 2000, p. 386)

After the preliminary design decisions for the dissertation study had been made, it was time to explore and stretch. The first phase of the study that I have just described sounds much clearer here, in retrospect, than it ever felt while it was going on. As I moved from thinking about design issues to actually implementing them, my thinking seemed to grow even fuzzier. My original plan outlined one semester for data collection and preliminary analysis, the exercises that Janesick describes above, and more formal analysis and writing during the summer months when I was not engaged in teaching full-time. As it turned out, I needed a lot of exercise before I was even close to being in good enough shape to write. This section describes different ways that I stretched not only before committing to the study, as Janesick recommends, but during it as well.

Review of Student Records

I usually begin each school year with a review of student records such as Individualized Education Plans (IEP's) psychological reports, special education program eligibility reports, and work samples. This review occurs with an eye to finding out how many hours each student is to be in my classroom, the academic subjects they are to

receive there, and the grade levels at which they perform. I have always tried to read such records doubtfully; many times the students that I meet seem to have nothing in common with those found on the pages piled between the covers of tattered file folders. In the case of the focal informants for this study, their records contained a mixture of fact and fiction. Reading these records, several of which were two inches thick, provided me with my first chance to “look awry” at how they had been constructed.

Subsequent readings of records provided clues regarding opportunities students had for literacy development, their literate behaviors (or the lack of them), and ways that they resisted the discourses of their classrooms and schools. While at first these records seemed to be no more than a collection of dry, numerically based reports, there were stories within them as well. These stories were part of Colby, Jennifer, Michael, and Ramon’s histories that they knew all too well but that I had been unaware of. Student records were a constant reminder of the ways that the dominant practices of school positioned the students as unable to get it right. As the study unfolded, I joined the long line of special education teachers whose responsibility was to add to the records, at times it seemed, in place of teaching. My words joined the discourse of labeling, sorting, observing, and normalizing that positioned students as disabled. This was but one of the sources of tension that threatened at times to stretch me to the breaking point.

Conversations with Parents

Each time an official document was added to student records, parents were invited to take part. Framed as IEP and eligibility meetings that took place in the spring of 2000, my conversations with parents were not interviews per se, although they shared similar features. A thorough review of records usually resulted in facts that seemed pertinent to

students' current academic and behavioral performances in the classroom. Adding parts of their histories to their present levels of performance provided an opportunity for parents to comment, rephrase, or refute their child's official school history.

Although IEP meetings generally follow a prescribed format (discussing present levels of performance, setting appropriate goals, and determining the placement that would allow the student to achieve those goals), each meeting has a different feeling depending on who is in attendance. Michael's meeting took place after an awards ceremony in which he won an award for achievement and a basketball. His mother listened quietly as I read Michael's present levels of performance, agreed with my interpretation of his school history, then shared her concerns regarding her younger son's transition to Southside the next year. Jennifer's mother made slight changes to my reading of Jennifer's special education history, brought up concerns she had about Jennifer's education, asked about opportunities for special education children compared to those available for regular education students, and described her own goals for Jennifer. This meeting had a similar feel to telephone conversations I had had with Jennifer's mom in the past.

Ramon's mother called the school on the day of his meeting and asked if she could come a little later than scheduled. When she arrived, she brought her new baby, who slept quietly for the duration of the meeting. We discussed Ramon's academic progress, his many transitions between his mother, stepfather, and father's houses in different states, and Ramon's desire to have different teachers for each of his classes. Ramon argued passionately for the opportunity to change classes, then sheepishly agreed with his mother that he didn't mind being in one classroom all day, he just enjoyed the

opportunity to “run the halls and get in trouble” between classes. Colby’s father did not attend his meeting, but his mother came by during post-planning to review his IEP and talk about her son. She pored over his goals, gave examples of his improvement in reading, shared stories of the classroom through Colby’s eyes, expressed concern about the stigmatization of self-contained placement, and worried about his attendance. While these meetings were not formal interviews with the purpose of gathering information for this study, they became a rich source of data that worked their way into the analysis.

I had the opportunity for further conversations with Jennifer and Colby’s mothers in connection with our class trip to Washington, D.C. in the fall of 2000. Colby’s mother helped plan and hold a yard sale to raise money for the trip, while Jennifer’s mother and stepsister served as chaperones. Both mothers shared many stories about their children in the informal settings of these events.

Reading, Reading, Reading

While immersed in teaching and data collection, I never stopped scouring the literature for studies that might be similar to my own, particularly those that related to innovative special education practices and poststructural analyses of any type.

Participation in a seminar at the university required the reading of the *Handbook of Literacy Research* (Kamil et al, 2000) for review. Suggestions from committee members were followed up on. More theoretical texts were balanced with texts related to the daily concerns of teaching struggling adolescent readers and writers. This eclectic mix of books, dissertations, journal articles, and handbooks helped keep various discourses in play as I struggled with theoretical and representational issues.

Tentative Steps: First Analyses

In the spring of 2000, I was feeling overwhelmed as I tried to juggle my multiple roles. Although I knew I was “supposed” to be writing field notes, days of planning and implementing a constructivist curriculum with twenty students, managing paraprofessionals, and dealing with technology that never seemed to work was taking its toll. Living four hours away from the university led to feeling isolated from the academic community. Recognizing this, one of my professors invited me to share a piece of data with his class of practicum teachers who were conducting action research projects of their own. This provided the impetus I needed to begin writing narrative field notes.

Although I had started writing field notes, I also had videotapes that needed to be watched. Typically I would set the camera up on a tripod, turn it on, aim it at focal informants, and let it roll until the event was over or the tape ran out. I would pack up the equipment at the end of the day eager to view the tape, watch a few minutes, and move on to other tasks. I knew that I should be watching more, analyzing more, but comforted myself with the idea that I would have all summer to do so. After all, if I didn’t plan something to teach, there would be nothing to tape! My first brief viewings, however, surprised me. While I remembered classroom experiences as chaotic and frustrating, the videotapes revealed students who looked calm and competent. At this point in the study, the videotapes served as encouragement to continue what I thought of as “fighting the good fight.”

The presence of the video camera in the classroom was tolerated by the students, who never did seem completely comfortable with being filmed. Later analysis supported this feeling, as I watched Colby put a box over the lens as he made comments directed to me regarding filming. One thing that seemed to make having the camera around worth it

was my willingness during choice time and field trips to have the children take charge and film events. Colby especially relished this role and recorded ongoing commentary for whatever he filmed. The spring of 2000 provided opportunities for students to record field trips, parties, and the last day of school. The videotape from the last day of school proved to be a turning point in this study.

Although described in detail in a subsequent chapter of this dissertation, the last day of school found me scrambling to complete records due the week before in the special education office and the students enjoying a day of freedom with the only instruction being not to disturb my work. I watched them only closely enough to make sure no one was injured, they stayed in the room, and no fights broke out. That night upon returning home, free of teaching responsibilities, I eagerly popped the tape in the camera to watch the day's events. What I observed immediately called my brain to attention, quickly matched up with previously flagged events, and circled around in my mind for several months until I had the opportunity to write up my first tentative rhizoanalysis.

Analysis: Rhizoanalysis

As a complete-member researcher with full access to students' school lives, I ran the ongoing risk of collecting huge amounts of data that would be difficult if not impossible to analyze. I spent over 1,000 hours in the classroom over the course of this study and collected seemingly as many pages of work samples, records, and other written documents. The amount of video data was only slightly less intimidating.

A kind of mental flagging helped me focus in as I collected observation data. Something occurs in the "back of my mind" as well as in my body when I observe

students and their practices that serves to "flag" those experiences in my memory. Over time, these flagged experiences become linked together and provide me with a working framework that often plays out in intuitive responses I make to classroom events. When I was home, away from the classroom, flagged memories suggested that I collect particular work samples, videotaped class sessions, email messages, and narratives. As I continued to return to the classroom, and as I revisited the data I had already collected, these activities in turn dictated more to collect. Further flagging occurred as students engaged in literate practices, and the tacit knowledge I worked from became more explicit. This recursive process resulted in the linking of discrete events into a network of thought, a cluster of ideas circling around common themes (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993), which were then examined within a poststructural frame.

While my mind was subconsciously flagging particular pieces of data as worthy of further attention, I needed a formal plan of analysis to begin making sense of what I was finding. Although I am aware that I am making decisions based on information gathered informally and formally about students' literate practices, too often these decisions are made from the "gut" rather than as a result of explicit theorizing. In this study, I wanted to make the implicit explicit and frame student practice and resistance within a poststructural analysis. My hope was that in doing this I would be able to better support students as they attempted to position themselves as able and literate individuals, as well as give others ideas for how to do the same in their own contexts. If my goal was to look at experience within a poststructural frame, my method of analysis would have to fit into that theoretical framework. So far poststructural theory had guided my research questions and study goals, the decision to do an ethnography of my own classroom,

selection of focal informants, and methods of data collection. It would also influence my choice of rhizoanalysis as the method of analysis for this study.

The methods discussed to this point, while consistent with the desire to theorize experience, have been firmly located in the real world of classroom practice.

Rhizoanalysis is grounded in Deleuze and Guattari's (1980/1987) concept of the rhizome, a theoretical construct or figuration that defies an easy categorization. "Certain approximate characteristics" (p. 7) of rhizomes can be discussed, however, and include "principles of connection and heterogeneity....a rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles. A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive" (p. 7). Multiplicity, rupture, cartography and decalomania are other "approximate characteristics of the rhizome" (p. 7).

Although crabgrass is the most commonly used example of a rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari provide other examples as well, including wolves, children, and music. "Music has always sent out lines of flight, like so many 'transformational multiplicities,' even overturning the very codes that structure or arborify it; that is why musical form, right down to its ruptures and proliferations, is comparable to a weed, a rhizome" (p. 12).

A rhizoanalysis, then, takes on the characteristics of the rhizome. Alvermann (2000b) describes rhizoanalysis as

a method of analyzing texts that allows us to see things in the middle.

Looking for middles rather than beginnings and endings makes it possible to decenter key linkages and find new ones, not by combining old ones in

new ways, but by remaining open to the proliferations of ruptures and discontinuities that in turn create other linkages (p.2).

In her rhizoanalysis, Alvermann (2000b) juxtaposes interview transcripts, music lyrics and criticism, text from advertisements, and descriptions of television shows in order to look at both data and her participants' lives in new ways. She began with data she had collected in a study of teenagers' literate practices in a library-based literacy club. The first step of the rhizoanalysis involved making maps that linked findings from the previous study with different examples of popular culture that had come to her attention in the course of a new study. Frustrated by the hierarchization of the data that resulted, Alvermann returned to the original texts and reread them, this time attending to the attachments and emotions they evoked. She then selected five pieces of data and juxtaposed them specifically to see what they did to each other and her textual others, as well as how they connected to her personally. Calling the result of the new analysis the *tracing* and her original analysis the *map*, she then *put the tracing back on the map* in order to find silences, or themes that had been omitted in the original analysis.

Alvermann then found other pieces of data she had not included in the rhizoanalysis that suggested that these themes – sexuality, race and class, and choice, had been present in the original data but rendered invisible by the first, more traditional, analysis.

Another example of a rhizoanalysis is a dissertation attempting to open technology discourses to difference. In her study, O'Riley(1999) uses focus group interviews with high school technology students, trickster tales, student writings from university courses she taught, and metaphors from feminist writing to deconstruct oppressive technology discourses and bring different groups of participants into contact

with a wide variety of theories, data, and voices. Using these data sets, O’Riley links and juxtaposes diverse theories and participant voices to craft several representations utilizing different types of analysis, including critical realist analysis, cultural analysis, and a poststructural data play. Both Alvermann and O’Riley incorporate stylistic devices found in poststructural ethnographic representation to be further discussed below.

Why is rhizoanalysis appropriate to this study? Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987), along with Foucault (1975/1979), wrote about the use of discipline and control by the state in western societies as technologies of normalization. This can be seen in the discourse of special education, which frames students who learn in ways different than the norm as abnormal or pathological. “The state” is what special education is all about, codifying difference and legislating how and where students are to be instructed. Rhizomatics is about rethinking difference and shattering subjects into multiple selves. Deleuze (1995) cautions, “There may be some surprises in store in the form of upsurges of young people, of women, that become possible simply because certain restrictions are removed” (p. 172). It was precisely this type of possibility that I was looking for in the course of this study.

Reading about rhizomes, rhizomatics, and rhizoanalysis captured my imagination. Words like *multiplicity*, *lines of flight*, *ruptures*, and *holey space* resonated both with how I thought of my students and the way I felt my mind naturally worked. My students often seemed to have multiple, contradictory selves that defied the rational individual of humanist thought, a multiplicity that often frustrated me in my attempts to “normalize” them. While I have often been criticized for the way my ideas and conversations appear to lack a central thought or “point,” rhizomatics’ connection to free association and

discovery of points where none had been seen before encouraged me to push this way of thinking rather than shy away from it. Holey space and ruptures tied into two different ideas I was learning more about: Foucault's power relations with its networks and vehicles of power, and the progress that my students made on their literacy journeys: not a trip that occurred in regular, predictable increments but rather one of fits and starts, long periods of frustration and seemingly no progress followed by sometimes rapid growth. I thought the figuration of the rhizome could help me look at old stories in new ways and open things up for my students and myself. Reading exemplars such as Alvermann's (2000b) rhizoanalysis excited me and provided a possible form for fitting disparate pieces of data together in order to find new links, links that might help me better understand who my students were and what their practices might mean.

Unfortunately, there were no instruction books, handbook chapters, or other how-to information on how to actually accomplish a rhizoanalysis. The two studies discussed above were the only examples of rhizoanalysis I was able to find over the course of the study. For me, rhizoanalysis became the identification of processes that I could use to encourage new semiotic chains that incorporated the linguistic, cognitive, and intuitive data I was collecting. I conceptualized the way I would do a rhizoanalysis as "surfing my web of the data," a very hypertextual process. At the same time, I struggled with how to represent such a thought process to communicate the new connections I was making not only to readers fully immersed in poststructural theory, but also to those who had never heard of it. While I decided to use rhizoanalysis during the first stage of this study, I did not know how the analysis would actually work until much later.

As part of my analytic process I have long used the computer software program *Inspiration!* (1994) to quickly brainstorm ideas, taking care to type anything that came into my mind regardless of how bizarre or unrelated to the topic it might seem. After all the ideas were out, I would then work toward grouping like ideas together and finding connections between things that at first seem unrelated. Trying out different shapes, colors, images, fonts, and locations for the idea boxes resulted in a visual representation of my thinking. The software has a feature that converts diagrams to outline form, so with the press of a button visually abstract images could be converted into more traditional linear hierarchies. These could then be examined to determine if they represented my thinking in any way. Going back and forth between diagrams and outlines usually resulted in something – an outline, a sentence, an idea - I could use to begin writing standard academic text.

I used this process again when I wrote Chapters Five and Six. I had so many stories recorded in my journal, email descriptions, work samples, and video transcripts collected I was almost overwhelmed. The amount of data combined with my memories of the events, the emotions they evoked and my continued immersion in the setting after data collection formally ended demanded a process that would begin to narrow things down. Using *Inspiration* to brainstorm helped me identify recurring themes without fear that I would leave something important out. I had a hard time not turning everything into a story, so rather than fight that tendency I just started listing all the “stories” I could remember, quickly typing them into the web as fast as I could think of them. This in itself helped me come up with themes as I would end up typing “titles” or main ideas rather than the whole story. One story would lead to another and then another, often leading me

to remember things that had happened that I had forgotten or not had the time to record in my journal. After I ran out of stories, I repeated the process with quotes from the literature I was reading. Often a story I thought of would remind me of a particular quote or study, so I would quickly type in a summary and then go back later and type in the quote or citation.

This resulted in a huge mass of entries. I knew I couldn't use everything, so I started looking for ideas that seemed to come up over and over again. I made boxes for these recurring ideas, picked a color for each of them, then colored each of the other boxes and started grouping and linking them. To make the connections more explicit, I wrote about how they connected on each link. In this way I started making implicit connections explicit and theorizing them. The process was very fluid. I kept mapping and drawing lines and writing descriptions until I felt more comfortable selecting a few stories to represent what I was finding. I then took these stories and turned them into vignettes. Sometimes I combined stories with one another and other pieces of data in order to get a vignette that represented what I was finding. I felt better about not using all the stories because all of the stories had played a part in the analysis.

At this point I hadn't written Chapters Five and Six – I still thought I would only have one chapter. I didn't know anything about *agency* or realize that would become a part of my analysis. I thought what I had done was “enough,” but got feedback that I had not theorized the data enough. I had found themes from looking at the discourses and practices that were going on in the classroom, but I had to go back to the literature to see how poststructural discourse worked, what it did. Why were the stories I selected so important to me? What did they do for me?

To theorize further, I started to look for connections between the exemplars I had chosen and the vignettes I had written, to puzzle out the puzzles. I created a new web as a way to get into the language of the exemplars and how the authors had analyzed their data (see Figure 1). In Chapter Five, I specifically wanted to look at practices that positioned the students as literate and able. I had many stories that I thought demonstrated that, but as I began my analysis I couldn't tie any of my experiences directly to theory. The point of the web in Figure 1, then, was to formally theorize experience. To begin, I went back to my goals for the study and the type of analysis I wanted to do. There was a section of my methodology that talked about what I wanted to theorize/analyze in the study. I cut part of that out and pasted it at the top of the web as a way of reminding myself what I wanted to look at/for. Then I looked at the list of stories I had compiled earlier with an eye to what I wanted to use the stories for and how those stories related to quotes I had liked in various articles and books. One quote involved the availability of power that comes with being recognizable and legitimately taking oneself up as a particular kind of subject. Another talked about how taking up poststructuralist discourse could disrupt taken-for-granted readings and open up moments for the students to go beyond the ways they were typically subjected. The last was about demonstrations of students getting it right and going beyond the positions of illiterate and disabled.

Looking at the story list, I chose Mike, Jenny and Ramon in the lab, the kids writing technology letters, my scaffolding of Jawan and Jamar, Mike's work with Jack, and Colby and Jawan in the lab as stories that I intuitively thought had something to do with the quotes described above. I wanted to use the webbing process to figure out what the stories had to do with the quotes explicitly.

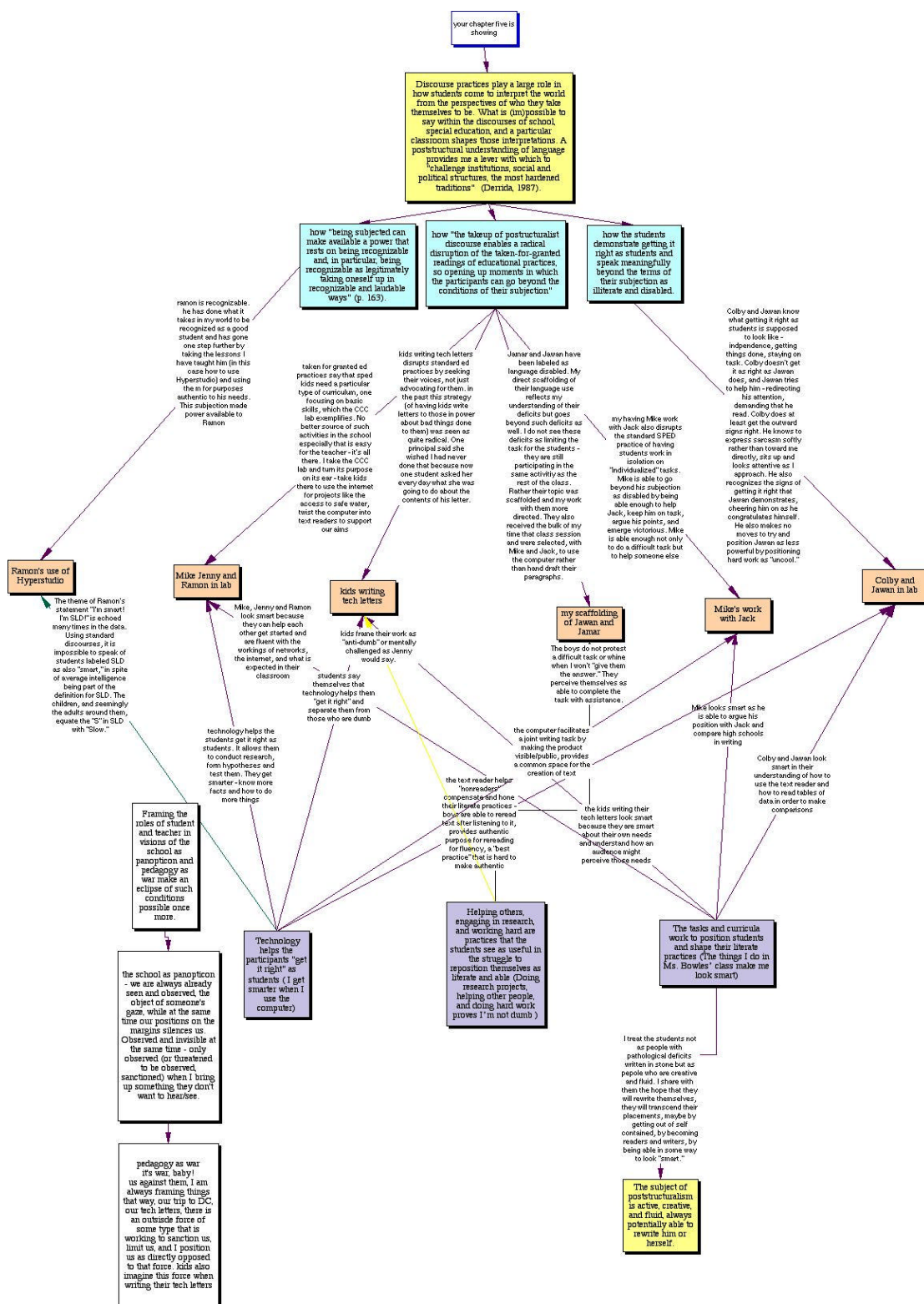
To complicate things further, I had looked at the videotape data and found three practices that the students and I seemed to think positioned them as literate and able. These practices (that I later came to think of as themes) came from things the students said and behaviors they exhibited on the videotapes. Helping others, engaging in research, and working hard, performing themselves as subjected, and using technology all helped the participants “get it right” as students. I put these practices at the bottom of the web.

I now had a three layer web: quotes from the literature at the top, data stories in the middle, and themes at the bottom. I then used the web to link the nodes together. For example, I looked at each story to see how it demonstrated the disruption of special-education-as-usual and/or opened up spaces for students to be read as literate and able. I typed how each story exemplified each quote and practice on the links connecting them. The text I typed on the links was then woven together in an analysis that followed each vignette.

What turned out to be Chapter Five was emerging, but something else was circulating in my head, an idea for another chapter, another analysis, one that was not so positive. Things kept standing out, both in my review of the data and in my daily experiences, “perfect examples” of how people viewed the students as disabled/illiterate, or as they would put it, “stupid.” There were a lot of these, but they were missing from the analysis described above. All of these stories came to be represented in my mind by the incident that occurred the last day of the 1999-2000 school year. That story just stuck there in the back of my mind, a story that all the other things that happened were compared to. The students kept coming back to the behaviors displayed on that last day

Figure 1

Your Chapter 5 is showing: Web for rhizonalysis



over and over again as well. We talked about the music together. I kept puzzling over what this event meant, what it did to the students and myself, how the discourses it exemplified worked to subject us.

In this case, all of these pieces of data were already connected before I began analyzing them. In what eventually turned out to be Chapter Six, I used rhizoanalysis not to form connections but to look at what had become old ideas in new ways. A communication with Cath Laws, one of my peer reviewers, introduced the idea of *rationalities*, or forms of knowledge that make particular forms of power possible. Taking this concept as a starting point, I used *Inspiration* to brainstorm the many rationalities that were implicit in the data. What did those rationalities have to say to us, how did they work to shape/subject? Brainstorming helped me not to stop with just one right answer, but keep going until I could think of no more. Then I took all the rationalities and linked them up with various pieces of data, writing more about how they were connected. Using the concept of agency I had begun developing in Chapter Five, I expanded the web to include the ways the rationalities worked to limit the students' possibilities for agency.

In creating the webs in Figures 2 and 3, I first noted the different resources needed for agency and broke the definitions for each term down. Then I thought about the different rationalities reflected in the school context and listed them according to the discourse community that they seemed to come from: the kids, myself, other teachers, and the fields of learning disabilities and psychology. For example, I had come to realize that I often accessed the rationality "boys will be boys" when setting and enforcing behavioral guidelines for the class. Figure 2 shows the web resulting from this process.

Figure 2

Brainstorming rationalities: Data and quotes side-by-side

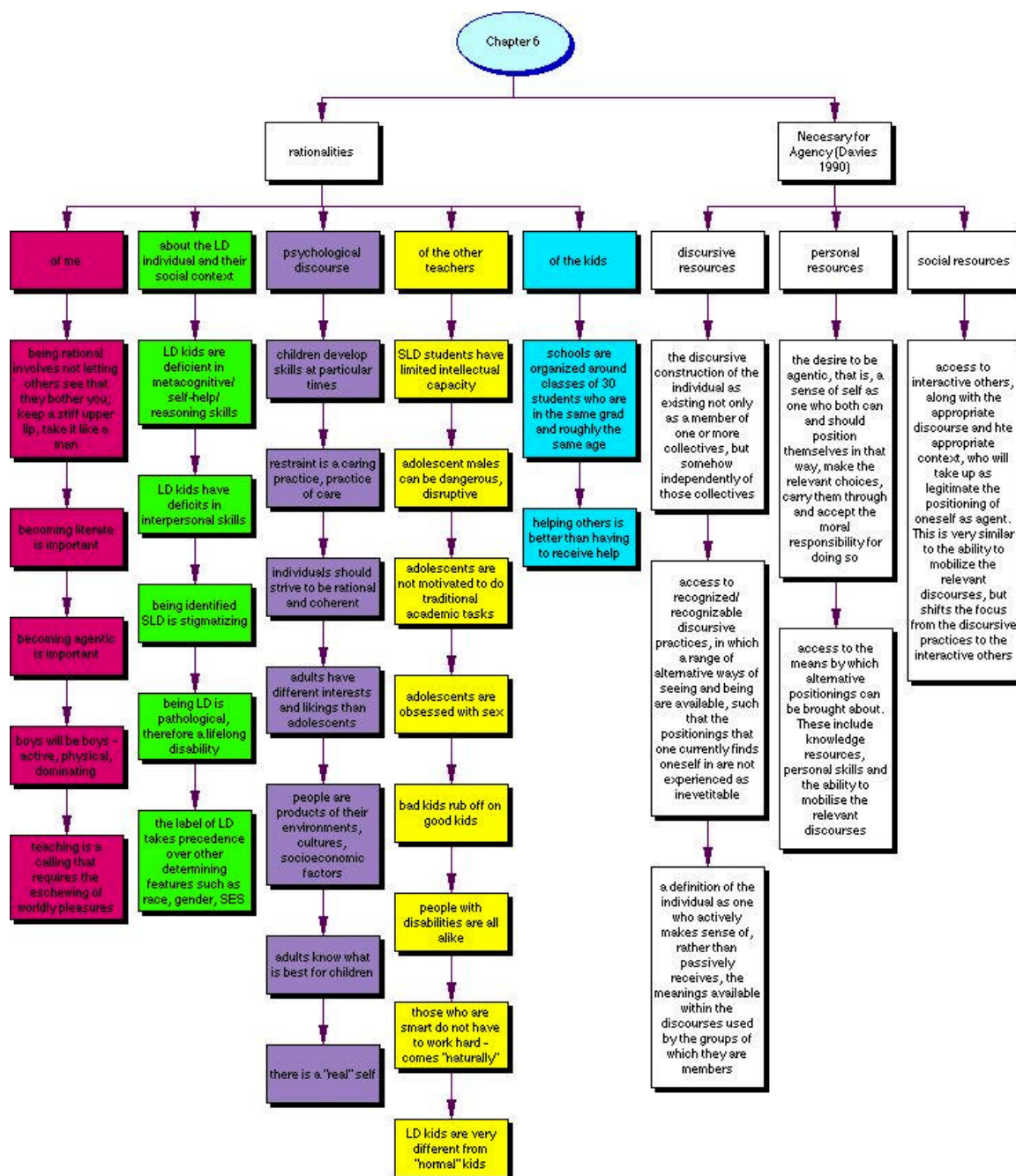
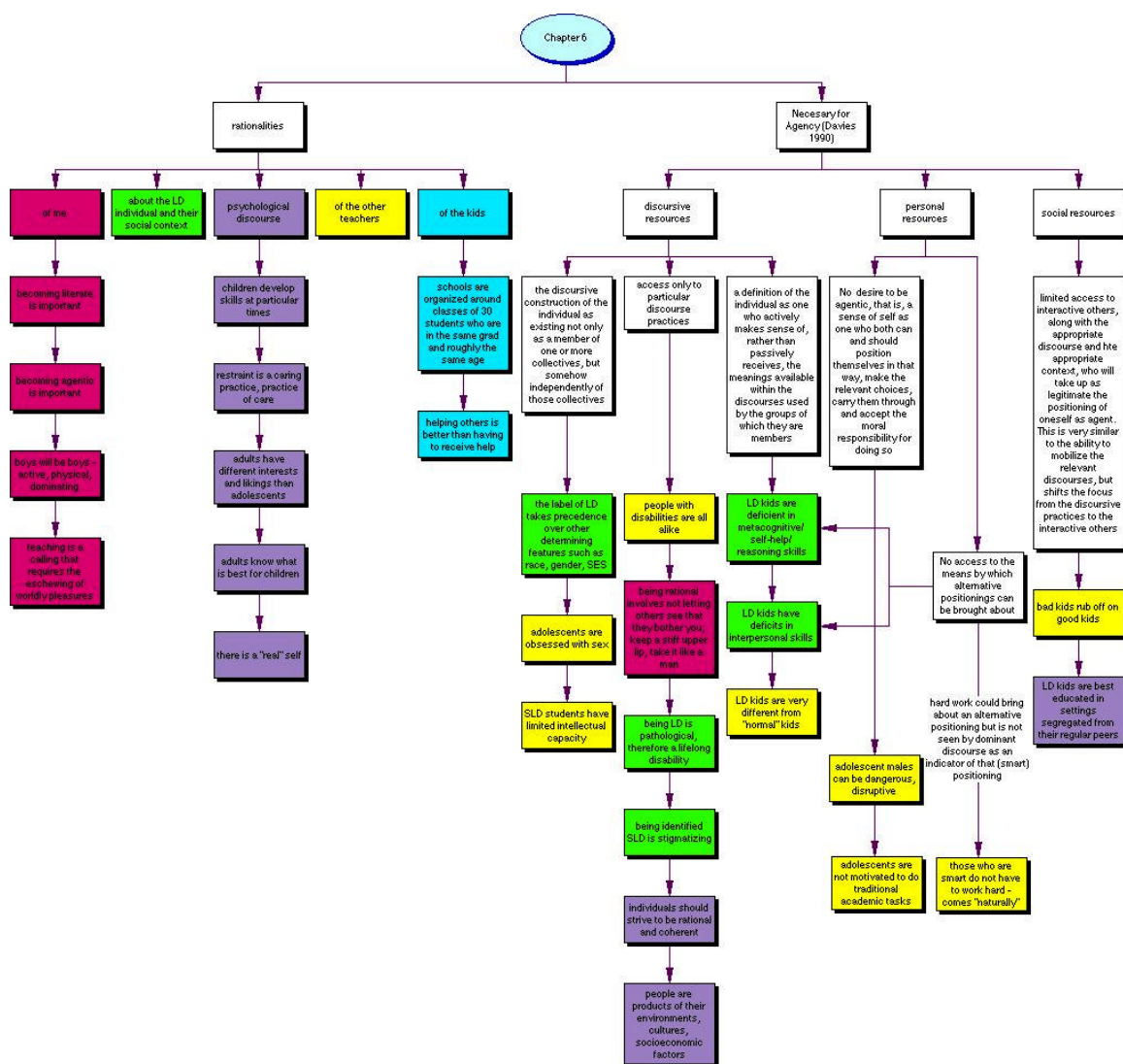


Figure 3

Rationalities and quotes: New combinations



In Figure 3, I looked at each of the rationalities to determine if any of them mapped onto the resources needed for agency or provided new ways of looking at why the students were often unable to position themselves as literate or able. These links then led to the inclusion of particular pieces of data in Chapter Six. These webs functioned differently than the web in Figure 1; while that web had helped to theorize a large collection of data stories, the later webs helped identify how particular pieces of data illustrated certain theories. Where Chapter Five dealt with making my intuitive analysis explicit, Chapter Six brought out themes in the data that I had not been aware of intuitively or explicitly. For example, until I had created the webs in Figures 2 and 3, I had not seen how the rationalities of adolescence were a part of the story of Mr. Raklas or the song lyrics of Eminem, and what role those rationalities might play in the increased stigmatization that students in LD programs feel as they move from elementary to middle school.

Brainstorming with *Inspiration* was a critical part of how I came to define rhizoanalysis. There were times, however, when sitting at my desk staring at the computer monitor did not result in the irruptions and lines of flight that I imagined rhizoanalysis should involve. Too much of a focus on the daily grind led to a sort of mental constipation that was often only relieved by trips to the university. These long drives, accompanied by loud music, freed my thinking. As I sat back and turned on the cruise control, all sorts of disparate ideas flowed through my head, bumping into one another in sometimes alarming ways. I believe an important part of the thinking I was able to do was related to listening to music, particularly music that I imagined to be relevant to the ideas I was trying to theorize, such as students' favorite songs or poststructural

feminist anthems. Trying to listen to unfamiliar music such as that played repeatedly on the last day of school from the perspective of the Other led to rhizomatic thinking, web searches, and theorizing about who my students and I were and who we could be. Sometimes I would take these ideas back home to map with *Inspiration*, and other times an idea would crystallize into the core of an analysis at that moment.

I've described in academic language what I did when I "did" a rhizoanalysis, but what I described isn't the whole truth. Oh, I wasn't lying, but the linear description and the tidy diagrams leave something out, that elusive something that is the magical, intuitive part of analysis we researchers seldom describe. I want to share this part too, lest the reader think that simply following the steps outlined above led directly to Chapters Five and Six of this dissertation. So, I've included a more rhizomatic description as well, written specifically for this section describing my analytical processes in order to clarify what I mean when I say rhizoanalysis led me on many "lines of flight." It is another story, a story of rhizomatic thinking.

It starts simply enough, gassed up, cruise control on, lean back the seat, and slip in the CD. As the road unwinds and the trees fly by, my mind is somewhere else, freed from the constraints of leading the class, planning the day, shutting my mouth, keeping it in. There is nothing else I should be doing
watch out for the deer

The music flows around me the way I imagine the air must flow around the car, some kind of diagram in the back of my mind.

Maybe we could take a field trip
 Take a tour of the state
 Maybe my worlds would finally come together
 Or maybe I should wait
 Maybe
 There is only one place
 Where such a union is meant to be
 Maybe that space is here
 This landscape
 This page
 This moment between you and me
 This space

I saw this guy on the train
 And he seemed to have gotten stuck
 In one of those abstract trances.
 And he was going: "Ugh...Ugh...Ugh..."
 And Fred said:
 "I think he's in some kind of pain.
 I think it's a pain cry."
 And I said: "Pain cry?"
 Then language is a virus."ⁱ

Why these feelings of isolation, of nostalgia for events
 Not yet over?
 Or is everything over the moment after it happens,
 Forcing us to
 Make things happen,
 Over and over again?
 Why do I so often write myself alone
 The nomad
 The warrior
 Looking to hold on to her smooth space
 Yet wondering
 Where everyone is
 What is it that makes me
 Listen to these same songs
 Over and over again?

Caught a lite sneeze caught a lite breeze
 Caught a lightweight lightningseed
 Boys on my left side
 Boys on my right side
 Boys in the middle
 And you're not here I need a big loan
 From the girl zoneⁱⁱ

The spiral dance
 invites and requires the search for a "third term,"
 positionalities for teachers who are neither
 goddess nor cyborg
 but always already
 both goddess and cyborg.
 Can we dance the spiral dance?
 What kind of dance is the spiral dance?
 The ballet of a
 Greek goddess?
 A postmodern march of the
 toy robot-soldiers?
 A do-si-do as we
 circle each other back to back?
 A clog dance of
 an alone standing woman?
 The back and forth of
 a jitterbug danced with
 broom in hand?
 A witches' circle (double, double,
 toil and trouble)?
 And whom will you
 choose for a partner?
 A goddess?
 A cyborg?
 An alone standing woman?
 and who might
 choose you?
 A witch?
 A laughing mother?ⁱⁱⁱ

Did I drink some poison
 that I don't remember now?
 Is there blood on my hands
 No, my hands are clean.
 Did I do something in another lifetime
 that was really really mean?
 Yeah, I'm hearing voices.
 Am I losing my mind?
 Think I'm going crazy, I gotta get out.
 I run into the street and I start to shout
 Get out of my way! Get out! Get out!^{iv}

Can we imagine a "laughing teacher"
 continuing the joyfulness of the
 laughing mother?
 A teacher unconstrained by
 cognitive learning theories
 and IEP's?
 A teacher laughing as she splashes

with her students in the simulated seas
 of an unnamed planet
 as they feel the warm equatorial waters on their
 bio-cyber bodies
 still back in the wintry midwest.

Like the goddess, the laughing teacher is
 unconstrained by the
 worldly search for good sex
 and an income reflecting her
 "comparable worth"
 Her laughter is undiminished by the
 "real world" of children
 dying from drive-by shootings
 of child abuse
 of preparing children for careers which have
 obsolesced, given way to the economies of
 postmodern technology.
 In her classroom
 students, too
 escape these worldly cares
 they make joyful noise
 tell tall tales
 play hide and seek in the
 electronic garden
 No Norman Rockwell teacher is she
 with tightly drawn hair
 pointer/punisher in hand
 and on her desk an apple, fruit of the
 tree of knowledge of good and evil
 The laughing teacher's hair blows free;
 in her hand she hold a magic wand,
 the fruit on her table is a jar of Tang,
 simulated postmodern sustenance for
 long excursions into
 exciting worlds uncharted and yet
 unknown^v.

Ms. Bowles' class is the best class in the whole school!

Did I drink some poison
 that I don't remember now?
 Is there blood on my hands?
 Did I do something in another lifetime
 that was really really mean?
 A small bullet, a piece of glass
 And your heart just grows around it.^{vi}

This is Ms. Bowles' camera. Going to Washington D.C. was her idea. Pretty cool, huh!

Thinking of myself as a nomad, a warrior. Pop culture images of Xena the Warrior Princess come to mind and I picture myself standing in front of the class, a babe with a spear. "Yeah, right!" Colby would probably say. But I stay for a moment in that space, that smooth space of the classroom that moves every year yet remains mysteriously the same.

She could hear, as she so often did, Miss Rover's voice inside her head: the measure of days from any one event to another is determined by a slide rule, Mercy, and time is a trickster. So is memory, Mercy thought. Miss Rover hovered like a cobweb, almost invisible, and sometimes Mercy could feel the fine silky touch of forbidden ideas. But more often Miss Rover began to seem like a wicked tale she kept telling herself, a perverse tale, a tale that smelt of vain questions, a tale that spoke of a spirit of rebellion which was punishable by...

'A taste for subversion,' she says, 'is a useful skill. It's important to turn ideas inside out, Mercy: to look at the linings, the underpinnings, the hidden seams. Unpick them with satire,' she says. 'See what happens.'^{vii}

Who am I really, and who is in me? Why does it matter so much who I am, and who my students can be? Rolling flying hurtling through space in this metal shell what does it all mean? It doesn't matter what it means, it's still signifying, good old dogshit D&G. A part of me, as I am a part of you, one big composition for English B.

And there is no simple answer, no clear thread line-of-thought-map for the reader of how this rhizoanalysis, this violent bouncing about, informs my teaching, or again, may not. Connections, of teachers to students, of women to men, of me to others and others to me, through the ever shifting significations of words without meaning, words without end, bouncing in deep space/dark night/georgia pine/loud music the freedom of interpretation, of holding your words as my heart grows around them bittersweet in the night.

And so there is another description, an example of rhizomatic thinking, a complement to the academic outline and figures. What does this version add to a discussion of rhizomatics that the others omit?

The first part sets the scene, describes the location of the analysis: my car. In my case being a graduate student has necessitated long commutes across the state back and forth to the university. A reluctant traveler who has a hard time sitting still, I have developed strategies to calm my hyper body, including letting my mind drift while listening to music. As it drifts, it begins to think, to associate, to link together song lyrics

with lesson plans with analytical sounding statements rehearsed or remembered from time spent in academe.

Something on the CD *Talk Normal* (Anderson, 2000) sneaks into my thoughts (or do my thoughts sneak into the song?). Language is a virus. Sounds sort of poststructural. Derrida might sympathize. Is the sign the thing? Who's the signifier? Such thinking leads to melancholy, a wondering if I will ever be able to use language, the necessary evil, to explain my data, my findings, my thinking.

Another CD. Miles flying by, where am I now? Are we there yet? Why am I always surrounded by boys? Why do I feel alone? Why do I want to bring you, the reader, into my world? A big loan from the girl zone. Even though everyone is always talking about the academy as male, phallic, logocentric, I see it as the girl zone, Bettie-Linda-Michelle-Alicia-Cathy-Sharon and the rest, and traveling there and back gives me sustenance, strength for the ever-present journey ahead, the "big loan."

And then I am back to myself again, still building strength, envisioning myself as the laughing teacher, the dancing teacher, the wild woman warrior with the magic wand and the blowing hair. All this driving/thinking/reading/writing has made me think of myself as particularly female, a new kind of woman. And I know sometimes at least the students sense it, that thing I like to think of as my fierce protective love of them (*you know how I feel about you, that I care about you*) and yes, I hear that in the things that they say to me, their many small acts of concession (*Don't think I don't see it. Don't think I don't appreciate it*). And I understand it a little better perhaps these days, being a student myself, how a teacher's words can always be with you, in your thoughts as you go through your day, and this makes me more sensitive to the relationships I have with

my own students, the power that you have, a heightened sense of awareness that learning requires leaps of faith. And suddenly the journey is done, the interstate coming to an end, the destination in sight. And it is time to turn off the music and get ready to return to the everyday world, and hope that the analysis has been enough to get me through.

Cooling Down: Design Decisions Made at the End of the Study

Leaving the Field

Although I had planned to “leave the field” at the end of the 1999-2000 school year, plans have a way of changing. A summer filled with thinking, reading, and writing had left almost no time for analysis. Returning to Southside to teach in a classroom with three of my focal informants from the 1999-2000 school year led to the irresistible temptation to continue collecting data, although in a more focused way than I had the year before. After my plans for the dissertation study were approved, I decided that data collection would stop at the Christmas holidays. I brought the two pieces I had written earlier to school to share with the paraprofessional and focal informants as a member check. I audiotaped our discussion, and spoke with the informants as a group regarding themes that were emerging from the data. I then transcribed our conversation, intending that to be the last formal data gathered. During the week after the holidays, however, a class discussion and writing assignment about learning with computers led to the students creating work samples that I wanted to include in the analysis, so this became the last data collected.

Final Analysis

As I began what I had thought would be the final stages of this study, representing the findings, I came to intimately understand Laurel Richardson’s conceptualization of

writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2000). It seemed the more I tried to begin, the more I needed to inquire. Suddenly after two semesters of what I thought was ongoing analysis, I realized that I had not analyzed my data deeply enough. This realization did not come easily nor on my own, rather it seemed I was led to it kicking and screaming. Though dialogue with my peer reviewers and committee chairs, I came to understand that as my study was ending, I was in the middle once again. Conversations led to more thinking, and thought resulted in going back to the literature once more, this time in search of specifics. If I wasn't doing enough theorizing, I needed to look at people who were.

Rather than reading the studies I had selected as exemplars during the initial stage of the study holistically, I looked at what language was used and how it was used. I took the data I had selected and my instincts that there were ways to analyze them poststructurally, found portions of the exemplars that seemed relevant, and used the structure of the exemplar to write a new analysis. After completing this exercise several times, I went on to use the new structures independently. During this process, I thought often of Bakhtin's (1981) reminder that forcing language to "submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process" (Bakhtin, p.342). In this way, poststructural theory helped me to theorize experience and think of things differently. For example, in analyzing the way an article containing multiple readings of a student named Hannah (Honan et al, 2000) worked, I selected the sentence "Poststructuralism opens up the possibility of encompassing the apparently contradictory with ease-even, on occasion, with pleasure"(Davies in Honan et al, 2000, par. xx) as

appropriate to my analysis of one the vignettes I had written. I then used the structure of the quote to write a sentence about my own data.

Politics and Ethics

What counts as research in the field of education, and specifically, literacy education, has evolved from a sole focus on positivistic, quantitative studies to include transgressive data, methodologies, analyses, and styles of representation (The 1999/2000 University of Georgia Doctoral Seminar in Reading Education, 2001). What counts as research is constantly being negotiated and redefined at the beginning of the 21st century.

As views of whose knowledge is important slowly shift from a sole focus on theorists and university-based researchers to include others, shifts in power occur as well. With such power shifts comes a certain degree of tension as roles are redefined. Baumann and Duffy-Hester (2000) found that 91% of the research sampled for their study of the genre of teacher research was collaborative, involving peers, students, families, or college faculty as coresearchers. Baumann and Duffy-Hester interpreted such collaboration as empowering, stating “our data affirm the prevalence and power of teachers collaborating with students and others in the teacher-research process” (p. 89). Another possible interpretation, however, is that teacher-researchers are viewed as unable to conduct research independently within a larger society that values and ascribes power to individual achievement.

Susan Lytle (2000) points out an extensive literature about teacher research exists that is written almost solely by university-based researchers. In contrast, much of the research conducted by teacher-researchers is published locally and not available beyond the context in which it is written. “Little of the scholarship about teacher research draws

explicitly on the published texts of teacher researchers ... Additionally there have been, to date, no comprehensive reviews of teacher research in any area that treat it as a literature or body of knowledge” (p. 693). Teacher research is rarely cited even when the topic of study is teacher research itself, further limiting its influence. Perhaps collaboration with university-based researchers is seen by teacher-researchers as an avenue into publication and power. Pratt (in Lytle, 2000) characterizes the relationship between university based and teacher researchers as a contact zone, a “social space where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (p. 692).

Although teacher-researchers may be faced with power differentials when attempting to disseminate their work, their voices are beginning to be recognized and heard. There are many examples in the field of literacy research of voices unheard. At times this may be intentional. Formal, academic prose has served to obscure the identity of the researcher and his or her subjectivity. Shanahan (2000) points out that identification and choice of studies for a research synthesis can be biased or skewed; this is easily hidden behind the false objectivity of the researcher. Researchers who ignore their own and their subjects’ cultural identities also ignore asymmetrical power relationships and their effects on data collection and analysis (Florio-Ruane & McVee, 2000), in effect silencing voices that speak from non-dominant Discourses (Gee, 2000). Research that describes educators using critical pedagogy give voice to students as they read and rewrite their worlds (Siegel & Fernandez, 2000). Research in the field of literacy education, like that of any field, can be used both to reinscribe and upset the status quo.

The tension of traditional roles "under erasure" (Spivak, 1974, p. xiv) were felt throughout this study. Although I shared certain characteristics of teacher researchers found in Baumann and Duffy-Hester's (2000) typology (research questions that evolve from within, theoretically driven and productive research, pragmatic and versatile methods), I also identified with the confusion and politicization surrounding terms such as action research, practitioner inquiry, and teacher inquiry. Conducting research - poststructural research at that - in my own classroom was reminiscent of the tension Fine and Weis (1996) felt as their work led them to "straddle the semifictions of empiricism and the intellectual spheres of critical theory, feminism, and poststructuralism." I empathized with their desire to

build theory, contextualize policy, pour much back into community work, and help to raise the next generation of progressive, multiracial/ethnic scholars. We try to position ourselves self-consciously and hope that our colleagues who are engaged in critical work and still plowing the fields for data will enter with us into this conversation about writing the wrongs and rights in the field...We toil on, looking for friends, writing for outrage, searching for a free space in which social research has a shot at producing both social theory and social change as the world turns rapidly to the Right. (par. 71)

In the current climate of our schools and universities, such a conversation is indeed political.

During the course of this study I questioned how I could deconstruct classroom practice without deconstructing myself. My erased-but-still-present roles collided in

various ways throughout this study. At times both my students and I were uncomfortable with my multiple hats. For every insight that improved my teaching it seemed there was a practical cost – days missed when I was writing or traveling to the university, students made uncomfortable by videotaping, the risk of being publicly displayed in ways spiraling out of our control.

How did I handle the ethics of conducting research in my own classroom? I tried in every aspect of this study to lay myself out there on the line at least as much as I did the students, knowing no matter what I did that I would never be as vulnerable as they were. Did I use my position of power to get them to agree to participate? Yes. Did they do things as part of this research that made them uncomfortable? Without a doubt. While I knew that their fears of being displayed as “handicapped” to those who would recognize them were largely ungrounded, I also knew (hoped?) that they would be displayed to much larger audiences than they could imagine. The proud teacher side of me that wanted to show them off to the world conflicted with the researcher side who was supposed to be concerned with protecting their anonymity.

In the end, it seems that I am not as concerned with the things that I knowingly did, the stories I intentionally told, the pictures I decided to share, than of the things that I unintentionally revealed. What is “common sense” within one discourse may be quite horrifying in another. Many of the things that I have become nonchalant about, even hardened toward, are in other contexts very troubling. While I was trying in this study to look at things in new ways, what things have I still been unable to see that might be readily apparent to others? And which of those things might present my students in a negative light? Sharing drafts of my stories and representations with my participants,

student teachers, my paraprofessional, and peer reviewers does not “fix” the problem of ethical representation. Those who were a part of the stories are not even with me in terms of power; those who are were not there to determine whether my stories are indeed accurate representations of what transpired. In the end, it is left to me to present as many sides of the story as I am able to see and to continually remind the reader that they are always already *my* stories.

I do not mean to present this study as having only negative consequences for the participants. Although the students no doubt agreed to participate partially because they wanted to please me, they also had their own agendas. Ramon was hoping that participating in the research would help provide documentation needed to get a laptop computer. Colby, Jennifer, and Michael liked the fact that they got pulled out of exploratory classes for testing and interviews. Colby continued to ask “when are we going to work on that project again?” well after the official time for data collection had ended. Since they had “done me a favor,” I returned it by pulling them periodically as they requested. Although I did wonder if the practical costs of the study outweighed its benefits, I do believe that my pedagogy improved immeasurably through the intensive reflexivity practiced over the two years I worked with the self-contained class. I can only hope that the thirty-something students that passed through that classroom were as positively affected by me as I was by them.

ⁱ Laurie Anderson, Language is a Virus. From Anderson, L. (2000). *Talk normal: The Laurie Anderson anthology* [Music CD]. Los Angeles: Warner Brothers Records Inc. & Rhino Entertainment Company.

ⁱⁱ Tori Amos, Caught a Light Sneeze. From Amos, T. (1991). *Little earthquakes* [Audio CD]. New York: Atlantic Recording Corporation.

ⁱⁱⁱ Adapted from Damarin, S. K. Would you rather be a cyborg or a goddess? On being a teacher in a postmodern century. *Feminist Teacher*, 8(2), 54-60.

^{iv} Laurie Anderson, Poison. From Anderson, L. (2000). *Talk normal: The Laurie Anderson anthology* [Music CD]. Los Angeles: Warner Brothers Records Inc. & Rhino Entertainment Company.

^v Adapted from Damarin, S. K. Would you rather be a cyborg or a goddess? On being a teacher in a postmodern century. *Feminist Teacher*, 8(2), 54-60.

^{vi} Laurie Anderson, Poison. From Anderson, L. (2000). *Talk normal: The Laurie Anderson anthology* [Music CD]. Los Angeles: Warner Brothers Records Inc. & Rhino Entertainment Company.

^{vii} From Hospital, J. T. (1996). *Oyster*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

CHAPTER 4

STIRRING THE GIANT CAULDRON: CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Setting Up the Room: August 2000

As the sun set behind the G wing, I looked around my classroom. The walls were scrubbed clean of the mold that had grown over the summer, as were the sixteen student desks that I had carried across the school myself. This was only the second year I had been brave enough to set up a middle school classroom this way for the first day of school. I had had a reading center as far back as I could remember. Well, I'd had one ever since I started teaching kids with learning disabilities (LD's) as opposed to those with behavior disorders (BD's). In elementary school my reading center had contained a bed in the shape of a race car. Somehow I didn't think that would go over too well in middle school. So now the reading center was furnished with area rugs, beanbag chairs and oversized pillows, an overflowing bookshelf, and colorful posters, all located in the front right corner. This year I had managed to locate several tables that no one else was using and asked the custodian to help me carry them to my room. The desks were grouped in the front of the room beneath the white board and the tables located in back for work on projects and more loosely structured activities. This arrangement seemed to help students who had a hard time understanding the difference between teacher led activities and student centered ones. Every year it seemed there were some kids who didn't understand when it was appropriate to jump up to sharpen their pencil and when it wasn't. Pointing out where they were sitting and where I was standing seemed to help, hence the more traditional desk arrangement in the front.

This year, though, I was taking some risks, putting my money where my mouth was. Students would still have individual desks, complete with name tags and personalized plastic containers for all those things that always seem to get lost. Now, however, the desks were arranged not in neat rows but in connected groups of four. I had

always felt it too risky to put children that close together on the first days before. What if they talked too much, smashed each others' fingers, kicked each other under the desks? What if they refused to sit close to someone else? What if they got into fights? I was cheating a little bit here. I knew most of the children from the year before, and Mrs. Lee, the paraprofessional I would be working with, had been with the group for several years. We knew who absolutely could not get along and who could help one another. I also had the new discipline code on my side, with zero tolerance for name calling, bullying, and physical altercations. Given my success with this arrangement last year, odds were good that it would work this year as well.

I smiled as I turned to the six computers at the back of the room. They sat on swaybacked tables under a built-in shelf complete with hooks for students' coats and bookbags. The previous school year we had only had three computers, one complete with printer, speakers, and a network/Internet connection. This computer, a Dell, was a recent model, unlike the other computer that I had found in the closet. That machine was much older – it only had a 286 processor, but worked for word processing and the older game collection I had pieced together through the years. The third computer, an older Macintosh, had once been my home computer. Since I had bought a newer model, I decided to bring this one to school. Although it was a contemporary of the 286, it would do everything the newer Dell would do except access the Internet. Both students and I preferred it for graphics and design. This year, however, my classroom had come with two newer Dell computers and a printer. Through an agreement with the university, I had procured four older Power Macintosh computers to expand our classroom collection. Looking at them now, I thought impatiently of the ethernet hub and wiring I had ordered to connect them to the Internet and wondered how long it would take them to come in.

In the back corner was Mrs. Lee's desk, an older piece rescued years before from the surplus pile with drawers that stuck and hung unevenly. Someone had painted it a dark brown. The custodians had just brought in a new teacher's desk, and it was in the front left corner. The plastic and packing tape had recently been removed, and office

supplies from previous years filled the drawers. Across the top of the white board, a hot pink banner with yellow letters read "Have you used your brain today?"

I looked around the room with satisfaction. After careful consideration and consultation with Mrs. Lee, all of the students had been assigned a seat. Those who I feared would have a hard time working with others were seated with only two students per group, placed diagonally across from one another. Two students who had fought the year before were placed in opposite corners of the room. Although the class role listed only three girls and half as many white students as black, I tried to make each group as heterogeneous as possible. I gave the desks a final dusting, making sure they were straight and the nametags secured. I took pride in my classroom. I tried every year to create a space that was welcoming, personalized, colorful, and print-rich. Posters advertising multicultural literature were hung on the wall next to empty space that would soon be filled with student work. I smiled to myself as I envisioned computer-published reports, giant graphs and charts, and illustrations of read-aloud scenes stuck haphazardly on the cement block walls. Somehow after only a few weeks of occupation, my classrooms always seemed full of life that threatened to burst from the seams at any moment. In the last days of preplanning was a feeling of the calm before a storm. Soon my class would enter this space, and my structure would be filled in with their different personalities and the group we would become together.

The Class 1999-2000/2000-2001

During the 1999-2000 school year, enrollment in the self-contained SLD class ranged from sixteen to twenty sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. Enrollment was fluid throughout the year, as students moved in and out of the district, were served in more and less restrictive placements, and as paraprofessional availability shifted. In all, twenty-four different students were taught in the self-contained classroom during the 1999-00 school year. During the last nine weeks of the school year, I collaborated with the resource SLD teacher for the reading/language arts and science/social studies block. During this time, my classroom was filled with seventeen self-contained students for the

majority of their school day, as well as ten resource students and their teacher.

Because of the large class size (16-20 students) in 1999-2000 and additional funds available from the state level, the county department of special education created two self-contained SLD classes at the school for the 2000-2001 school year. I began the year with seven students labeled self-contained SLD or Other Health Impaired (OHI). Appendix A indicates each student's grade placement, blocks served, and length of time in my classroom over the course of the study.

The Four: Histories

Each of the four students involved in this study brought their personal and school histories with them when they entered our classroom. Through observations, teaching interactions, student work samples, parent conferences and the academic histories provided in their IEP's, a picture of these histories began to emerge. Below is a snapshot of each participant in the study. Subsequent chapters will build upon these initial descriptions.

Colby

When I first met Colby as a new sixth grader, he was quiet and dreamy. I would often look up from whatever I was doing to see him drifting around the room, usually ending up standing in the corner and staring into space. His blond hair hung over his eyes, and he seemed to use his haircut to hide from the world. Other than his wandering, Colby had no behavior problems and would often sit quietly with his head down on his book, sleeping or daydreaming. When caught, he would smile and promise to get to work. Seconds later, he was off task again. In a room where it seemed there were many children with inappropriate and attention-seeking behaviors, it was easy to neglect one who simply daydreamed. Colby was frustrated by textbook and worksheet assignments, had problems spelling three-letter words, and seemed to be a nonreader. He also missed at least one day a week of school.

One of the students who had behavior problems in the classroom was Colby's older brother. I had heard a lot about his brother the year before and knew that their

I'm Colby. I'm in the 6th grade. I'm good at science because you get to make chemicals out of the potions. In Language Arts, we go to the computer lab and read off the computers and type. We do math in the classroom and memorize our multiplication tables. I am good at reasoning and oral expression. Projects we made are the dinosaurs, and Egypt and the high schools and people listening to what I had written.

Things that could help me with my reading is putting it in the computer to help me pronounce stuff and listening to people read stuff. Doing things over & over to study would help me learn things.

- Colby, May 2000

Student Work Sample: Writing assignment
"Write a letter discussing your strengths and weaknesses to be placed in your IEP"

parents had just gone through an ugly divorce. At one point in the parents' fight for custody of their five children, Colby and his brother had been placed in the local children's home. Although Colby's brother had a negative relationship with his mother and appeared angry and depressed, Colby apparently got along with both of his parents and seemed quite cheerful. He also seemed to regard me positively, even as I disciplined his brother more

severely and eventually removed him from the SLD program because of a lack of motivation and chronic disruptive behaviors.

All of the children in Colby's family have been in programs for the learning disabled. Colby was placed in a self-contained program in early elementary school. During a conference in the spring of 2000, Colby's mother related that the LD students in her children's classes didn't have access to many of the activities their regular education peers did such as the accelerated reader program and field trips. Her children often came home in tears after other children teased them for being "retarded." While some of Colby's siblings had become angry about their placements and had "shut down" academically, Colby seemed more able to let things "roll off him." Colby's mother had encouraged his older brother to protect him because he was often teased and beaten up by other children. She regarded Colby as the child who had the most "get up and go" in the family and "had the most going for him." Colby's father characterized him as sweet and easy-going, like his younger sister and unlike his two brothers still living at home



who were angry and difficult to control. Colby's initial testing for the SLD program indicated that he had weaknesses in oral expression, listening comprehension, basic reading, reading comprehension, and math calculation, with a strength in math reasoning. His reevaluation three years later showed that Colby had strengths in oral expression and math reasoning, with weaknesses in basic reading and reading comprehension,

written expression, and math calculation. Informal post-testing completed in the spring of 1999 indicated that Colby decoded and spelled at a first grade level, read orally at a second grade level, comprehended written text at a third grade level, wrote sentences at a second grade level, and calculated on a third grade level. Colby's classroom performance during the 1999-2000 school year did not support these levels, however. In the classroom, Colby's oral reading and comprehension of trade books was closer to a preprimer/primer level, and he struggled to complete problems in a third grade math text without assistance. His spelling and written expression skills were closer to a

Field Notes August 2000 This all sounds so sensible here, so sane. And yet that is not the whole story. To leave out the messy parts, forego the opportunity to tell how I tried to find the power to rewrite myself, "think outside the box" as my principal would say, would be shameful. A veritable violation of validity. And so the transgressive will intrude. Ah, and this was coming along so well.

You see, I did not exactly begin the 2000-2001 school year with seven students labeled self-contained. I was scheduled to do so, but at the last minute plans changed. You may remember earlier

I mentioned that keeping the same position in my system is unusual, at least in my experience. Suddenly, on the last in-service day, I was wrenched out of my happy planning and the eager anticipation of my students' arrival. I was to teach resource students, those with learning and/or behavior disorders. I saw myself as a game piece, randomly hurled about the board, not even knowing how the game is played. I said I was not interested. The war machine stirred. Where before I would have become a sniveling mass of nerves, I now thought strategically of ways to redefine my role. I would not fill the vacant position of

Subject: stuff
 Date: Monday, 30 August 1999 17:15:40
 From: steffb@usa.net
 To: Sharon

Hey, hope your classes are going well. It must be nice to be teaching grown ups! My kids are all still doing pretty much ok - just trying to get them to see the balance between "fun" talk and that related to work. Good luck, right?! The worst thing is that I just got two new kids, more interim ones, these are from NJ and their IEP's are two years old. They were in Savannah a whole year apparently and no new paper-work. That puts my class size at 17, which is WAY too big! Most of the kids are willing to do most things, but they are so low. About 5-6 seem to be 1st grade or below, another 5-6 are below 3rd grade, and the "high" group (who I think may be ready for resource) are above third, probably 3-4 GL. They appear to have no skills listening to lectures. We have been working on knowing what to do once I "turn them loose" on an assignment, but we have a long, long way to go. I still only have 3 sixth graders, and I wish the others I think are out there somewhere would turn up because then the class would probably split. As it is now they will probably trickle in all year long and nothing will ever be done with it.

Well, enough of that. I could probably go on about school all day long, as you know! I was just checking my email and decided I should see how you were doing. I'll miss seeing you on my trip to Athens! I don't think it's really sunk in yet :-)

Talk to you soon,

Steff

email message to Sharon, friend and peer reviewer

"interrelated teacher," but I would try to help out the principal and other special education teachers. The line in the sand was drawn, and I was left to hold my breath and see whether I would cross it or not. I'd like to think I would have indeed left on principle, but it turned out to be unnecessary. Positions shifted, and I was assigned self-contained SLD once more with the caveat of continuing to serve selected resource students. Where the year before I had taught seventeen self-contained students, many with behavior problems, now I

had seven self-contained students and ten resource students, only one of whom seemed to have serious behavior problems. The situation changed further with the transfer of a teacher from regular to special ed, resulting in our team teaching both sets of students as I oriented her to her position.

This unusual state of affairs had many interesting effects on all of those involved. It made me rethink the way I had come to think of the role of principal as always dominating, disrespectful of teachers' opinions. It made it clear to both myself and the self-contained students that we wanted to continue our relationships. It also blurred the boundaries of self-contained and resource placements since children from both programs were in the same classroom. Dominic, so aware of his placement and eager to transition from self-contained to resource, was delighted to find out our new classroom was "both." Another student asked after the third week of school, "I'm not trying to check anybody, but is this class special ed?" Her question echoed a similar one asked by a sixth grader the week before. Somehow, although each of the children knew they were "special," they were not so sure about the class. I could identify - I couldn't get it straight in my head who was "mine." It would take a while to sort out.

August 28, 2000 I remember the first week of school. All my plans, I was so excited, after Bob's class, I felt like I finally knew what to do with older kids. And I thought I was getting eighth graders. And then Beth got them instead, I felt like I betrayed them because I wanted them and they said all last year they wanted me. I even had dreams about them for heaven's sake. I remember meeting at Beth's to get our syllabus together for the first nine weeks, and I had done mine already and was so excited about it and then I couldn't use it, had to start all over and I had no idea what to do, none at all, I was just fumbling and grasping around. I remember how I just started crying, I just couldn't stop, and they were all worried and trying to convince me that I was "the right person" for the job, and I couldn't explain, I mean, I thought I was the right person too, it was just too much of a shock, too much of a transition. And that was before I think I had actually taught them!

I remember when I tried one of Bob's ideas, passed out a book chapter and told them to underline a paragraph, sentence, word they liked then write their own word. I remember trying to have them read their paragraph and how awful it was, how they couldn't do it, they seemed willing but it was painful, it hurt to listen to them try to read. I remember how I thought, ok, I'll save them, have them do a journal entry, and they couldn't do that either, they didn't understand what to do or the prompt or wouldn't write, or - I can't even really remember what it was, I just remember for two days I was depressed. Really depressed, my heart was heavy, I felt like I couldn't go on, couldn't teach, but I wasn't angry at them, or angry at all, yet, just sad, really sad, like the weight of the world was on

my shoulders, the weight of their collective failure, lack of success, there were so many of them and I just didn't know what to do, and then I did get pissed, really pissed, that someone had done this to them, kept them at this stage, they couldn't go on, all of these kids whose records said one thing about what they were capable of (why I tried that fool activity in the first place, reading those pointless, stupid, records) and whose embodiment of illiteracy said quite another. I don't usually think this way, I don't see kids as failures, I don't know what to do - all these thoughts kept going through my mind and they were new to me, and I didn't know how to handle them. And I spent the whole first nine weeks trying to handle them, and it didn't work.

Subject: Re: Hi
Date: Wed, 06 Oct 1999 21:42:55 -0500
From: steffb@usa.net
To: Sharon

I almost called you the other night. I was really down because "everybody" at school is going on about how I'm always trying to get rid of my kids. This, of course, is because I'm trying to put my highest kids in the reg classroom for one block a day, so maybe hopefully they can be resource by the time they go to high school and be able to get a reg ed diploma. I was informed of this rumor by the principal himself. He said HE didn't necessarily believe it, it was just what was being said. Helpful guy. The worst thing is that one of my "friends" was jumping on the reg ed bandwagon and saying I was asking the reg ed teachers "for a favor!" I told her I couldn't believe she was saying that since all she's been saying since I've known her is how these kids have to get back to the regular classroom. She had some of the kids in my class two years ago, and she's acting like none of them have changed since then. This is ironic since the para who just came back Monday can say nothing but how much better they are now than they used to be. Guess how many kids we are talking about - 6 out of my 16. My original idea was to put four of them in a reg sci/ss class with the para to ease the transition. Shocking! So, I'm going to plan B and putting four of them in different places with no support and seeing if they make it. If they do, I'll put them resource at Christmas. Two of them are eighth graders - this is it almost before it is too late.

email message to Sharon, friend and peer reviewer

kindergarten-first grade level. Testing on the Woodcock Johnson in January 2000 showed Colby's word attack skills at the K.7 grade level, supporting what I had observed in the classroom.

By the end of the 1999-2000 school year, informal and formal tests indicated that Colby decoded and comprehended text at a beginning second grade level, wrote on a beginning third grade level, and calculated on an ending third grade level. Both his mother and his volunteer mentor felt that Colby had made gains in his reading skills. For a getting-to-know-you activity completed August 2000, Colby wrote that science and social studies were his favorite subjects because "you get to make projects." Projects have clearly become Colby's preferred method of instruction and a part of his story.

Jennifer

The first time I saw Jennifer was during the 1998-1999 school year when I asked her teacher to watch one of my students while I was in a meeting. One of the few girls in the self-contained classroom, Jennifer sat quietly in her seat, her sparkling black eyes, dimples, and long black braids immediately drawing my eye. Her smooth medium brown complexion and European features reminded me of dolls designed for African-American children. Over the next few years, many people would refer to Jennifer's beauty when I talked with them about her.

Jennifer could easily be described as any teacher's dream. Quiet, well behaved,

I'm Jennifer. I can work on a computer real good, [better] than writing on a piece of paper. I'm not so good at understanding what words mean.

- Jennifer, May 2000

Student Work Sample: Writing assignment
"Write a letter discussing your strengths and weaknesses to be placed in your IEP"

helpful with other students and a diligent worker, she worked well with anyone sitting near her. In the fall of 1999, Jennifer took an extremely long time to complete written assignments and was therefore required to do less work than any of the other students. Math fact sheets designed to take five to ten

minutes to complete took Jennifer an entire ninety-minute period. When asked what worked and didn't work for her in math, she noted that the facts "took too long," and we decided that she should not do math facts but start work on her textbook assignment immediately. This was successful, and Jennifer proved to be similarly perceptive about her strengths and weaknesses over the course of the year.

Jennifer's quiet demeanor is related to a language disability. Her language skills developed normally until she was 18 months old when she had a series of strokes that left her unable to speak. Jennifer's parents were instrumental in her regaining language skills, working with her at home, and enrolling her in the Preschool Intervention program. Jennifer has been taught in full day special education programs since that time. According to the



most recent eligibility report in Jennifer's special education records, she has an academic strength in reading skills and a relative strength in reading comprehension. Oral expression, listening comprehension, math calculation and reasoning, and written expression are deficit areas. Jennifer has a difficult time understanding questions posed orally, and often gives responses that do not relate to the question. When she understands a task or question, however, she provides the correct information.

Like Colby's mother, Jennifer's mother also indicated dissatisfaction with the opportunities provided students in SLD programs. During Jennifer's IEP meeting in the

spring of 2000, her mother was upset that during the schoolwide enrichment program, Jennifer had been enrolled in "study skills" each time. She felt that Jennifer had not had the opportunity to participate in band or chorus in elementary school even though music is a strong area for her since her father was a musician. Jennifer's mother wished she could participate more in school events and said that she was willing to volunteer for whatever was needed, but no one had ever asked her. She also questioned why Jennifer had never been assigned any textbooks since she had been in school. Jennifer's parents spoke with her often about what she did in school, encouraged her to work hard, and made sure that she completed homework assignments. Jennifer worked with them in their tuxedo shop, where they helped her learn money and time concepts.

Testing in March of 1999 indicated that Jennifer decoded on a third grade level, comprehended at a beginning fourth grade level, and calculated at a mid third grade level. Her most significant weakness, however, was in written expression, where she scored below first grade level. Post testing in the spring of 2000 showed regression in reading comprehension, little change in math calculation, some improvement in math reasoning, and four years' grade equivalents in written expression. It is difficult to determine whether Jennifer understands the text she reads as she often has problems understanding teacher and textbook questions. Talking informally with Jennifer about what she has read often reveals a partial understanding of the material.

While Jennifer still demonstrates problems with individual textbook and testing tasks, she performs much better when working with others. She is able to help other students without giving them the answers, questioning them and guiding them to the correct response. She is often a stern taskmaster, hitting her partner's paper with her pencil and saying, "get on task!" Jennifer is well liked in the classroom, and others often ask to work with her. This is particularly interesting in light of her status as the only girl in the class during some periods. Jennifer appears to be generally regarded as a friend by the boys in the class rather than a girlfriend. When questioned by classmates about her relationship with Michael, she said, "it's not like that, we're just friends, man!"

Although she sometimes has a hard time articulating what she thinks, Jennifer seems to comprehend what is going on around her and has opinions about her needs.

Michael

Before I met Michael, I had heard many things about him from his teacher of the previous year and Mrs. Lee. The most alarming to me was his reported tendency to cry for hours after he received corrections on classwork or wasn't allowed to get a drink of water when he asked to. Mrs. Lee had worked with Michael the year before and confided that she and the teacher had often hidden his papers and given in to all his requests in order to avoid crying sessions. In spite of this behavior, however, she reported that Michael was never teased by others in the class and was well liked.

Prepared for crying, my first goal for Michael was to say "no" to him rather than simply avoid conflict. Although there were times when he became upset and hid his face in his shirt, I never did observe the behaviors that had been common the year before. Gradually, we began showing Michael his mistakes and asking that he correct them. By the end of the 1999-2000 school year, he was able to accept and correct errors with only an occasional teardrop.

When I did bus duty in the mornings, I often saw Michael getting off one of

the "pickle buses," the small buses used to transport students in special education programs. He was always last in a line of students with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities who also had physical disabilities, walking some distance away with his head down and eyes averted, a



frown on his face. This mood lasted into first period, when other students remarked that "Mike must be sleepy." It was only later that I realized that Michael was extremely unhappy riding the "special bus," and checked his records to learn why he did not ride the same bus as others in his neighborhood. I discovered that when Michael was in elementary school, he had had extremely unpredictable and violent mood swings, one of which resulted in a serious bus incident. After several attendants got a struggling Michael on the bus, he broke free from his seat restraint and jumped out of the back of the bus, hung on the rear view mirror, and finally required a police escort home. I had a hard time with the idea that my Michael was the one described in the records. Since that time, he has been required to ride a special education bus with a bus attendant.

Michael has a diagnosis of autism and developmental delay and was originally taught in a program for students with emotional and behavioral problems. After making progress in the areas of behavior and interpersonal relations, he was transitioned to the SLD program. Michael has spent all of his school years in self-contained special education programs. Although he was mainstreamed in elementary school, his teacher reported that he did not interact with others or complete assignments. His records indicate that he had no relationships with others and did not understand humor.

When I began working with Michael, it was easy to see him as a fragile student who diligently answered all questions – incorrectly. Anecdotal records from fall 1999 document my worries that Michael did not yet

I'm Mike. I am good in math. I like to subtract and add. I am good on my math facts. I must do well in social studies. I am good in social studies facts. I like to do my projects and maps. I'm not good in reading.

I like the teacher to help me. I don't like to read out loud and I don't understand reading. I don't like science. I don't like doing science activities. I don't like using technology.

I need help because I can't do reading really good. I need help for social studies. I need the teacher to help me so I can be smart and do reading and writing really good and social studies.

- Michael, Spring 2000

Student Work Sample: Writing assignment

"Write a letter discussing your strengths and weaknesses to be placed in your IEP"

seem to understand that writing was "speech written down." He rarely spoke and could not answer questions posed to him directly but would stare at me, mute. Michael gradually began to speak more and then went through a stage in which he babbled nonstop throughout the day and called his friends by odd nicknames until they begged him to stop, causing him to giggle. One day as the class was making a physical representation of the multiplication table, Michael was the only student who understood how to do it. Taking charge of the activity, he moved from group to group, pointing out mistakes and instructing others how to do the task correctly. Michael proved excellent at guiding group tasks, especially those involving charts, tables, or graphs. This was a new side to Michael, one that had previously gone unnoticed.

Like Jennifer, Michael also had strong opinions regarding his strengths, weaknesses, and what he needed to help him learn better. According to work samples, Michael agreed with his peers and teachers that math was his strength, while comprehending and writing were still difficult for him. Post testing in the spring of 2000 indicated that Michael calculated at an upper fourth grade level, wrote at a second grade level, and spelled and read at a first grade level.

Michael is now much more social than his earlier records indicate. As an eighth grader, he is an "elder statesman" in the class and works well with others both his age and younger. He loves to get into debates about math problems, and his health teacher related in a conversation with me that his work habits in class depend on "who he's sitting by." Michael now rides a regular bus and asks me at least once a week when he can have another class in the regular classroom. Although Michael still struggles with literacy skills, his asking to be scheduled for a "class out" suggests that he is beginning to see himself as able to try a regular class.

Ramon

Ramon's entry into the class was as dynamic as his personality. One sunny day in October, we were waiting for the bus to come to take us on our field trip to buy books for the reading center, the culmination of a week-long project. Suddenly at the door were the

counselor, a boy in a turquoise jersey, a pregnant woman, a man in army fatigues, and several small children. Before I could greet them, the telephone rang, announcing the arrival of our bus. With barely time for introductions, I got Ramon's parents to sign a permission slip so that he could go with us, and we were off. Most of our interactions would have a similar, chaotic feel.

Ramon entered Southside Middle School as an interim student from out of state, which meant that he would need to be reevaluated to determine his eligibility for SLD services under Georgia program guidelines. He had been taught in a self-contained program for students with learning disabilities prior to his enrollment at Southside. Ramon also had a diagnosis of Attention Deficit with Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and was on medication. Ramon was legally blind in one eye and had thinning hair that often led to other teachers taking me aside and asking me what was "wrong with him." Although Ramon could be uncomfortable in new situations if he was afraid that others would tease him, he was generally talkative, laughing, and constantly on the go. Ramon was always aware of what was going on around the school before anyone else, including people in the center of the action. In his IEP meeting in the spring of 2000, the art teacher remarked

that Ramon was "passionate in everything he does." This truly seems the best description of Ramon, a young man who is difficult to label with one word.



I'm Ramon. I am not good at math, reading, and memory. I'm not good at dividing and minusing in math. I am good at adding and times. It's easy to add and times because I learned in third grade. I hate to borrow and minus. It's hard because it takes me at least ten minutes to get done with one problem. If I had more time to get my work done I would be fine with borrowing and minusing.

Reading is hard for me because I can't sound out big words. I have trouble with chapter books. If I read a book without help I wouldn't understand the book but if it is read to me I will understand it. Reading is one of my weak areas. If I had to read a chapter book all by myself it would take me two months.

I have trouble remembering what somebody says sometimes. If you tell me something and I am not looking I won't even know you are there. I will only remember stuff I am interested in. If I was given something to help me remember things like a memory game that would help me a lot. If I am supposed to remember something I will probably forget.

- Ramon, May 2000

Student Work Sample: Writing assignment

"Write a letter discussing your strengths and weaknesses to be placed in your IEP"

Ramon entered Southside with higher academic levels than many of the students in the classroom. Since his psychological report from his previous school showed all test scores hovering around the third grade level, the psychologist and I fretted that Ramon would not qualify for the SLD program in the state of Georgia because of weak academics.

Although Ramon

appeared to have a visual motor processing weakness that was reflected in his spelling and math performance, the more significant problem seemed to be behaviors related to ADHD. Ramon had an extremely difficult time remaining seated and on task and took from five to fifteen minutes to begin, often jumping up after he finally did begin to sharpen his pencil. In spite of this, he seemed to understand the point of lessons and the structure of the curriculum better than anyone else. Over the course of the 1999-2000 school year, Ramon made significant progress in controlling his behavior and responded especially well to instruction in study skills and learning strategies. He could often be observed explaining to others that they were not "being sensitive to feedback" or "pushing themselves – no coasting." Of the students involved in the study, Ramon made the most gain on academic post testing.

Ramon seemed especially motivated by and talented in the use of the computer. Organizational problems fell away as he labeled disks, created checklists of graphics, and created web pages. After discovering that an Alphasmart portable keyboard was in the closet of the resource classroom because no one could get it to work, he got permission to use it, set it up, and by the next day knew not only how to use it but how to connect it to a computer and output text files he had saved on it. Ramon used the Alphasmart for the remainder of the year for lengthy written assignments and had begun his autobiography.

In the fall of 2000, Ramon's mother came to the school and explained that Ramon had decided to live with his father during the coming school year. Although she had had trouble with Ramon at home over the past school year, she felt he had matured during the summer. She recounted how Ramon had explained his desire to live with his father "like a little man." She felt it would be good for him to be the only child in the household. Ramon continued to be a part of this study during the 1999-2000 school year.

The Curriculum

In this section I introduce the curriculum and the theories that guided its design and implementation. Although constructivist theory was the largest influence on curriculum design and selection of materials, poststructural theory helped clarify for me issues of implementation. In the following section, I particularly want to look at aspects of Foucault's power/ knowledge nexus in relation to curricular decisions. The theory is that relations of power presuppose and shape knowledge. Part of being subjected concerns how we watch ourselves, regulate ourselves in terms of particular norms or standards. Such norms and standards also shape curriculum design.

When a teacher sets out to create a curriculum, power/knowledge relationships come into play. In my case the theory of constructivism is very powerful. I want to be read as a good constructivist teacher. The discourse of constructivism is powerful – it shapes my knowledge and practice. I am subjected as constructivist teacher. In being recognized as a good teacher, I become powerful – I am read as able to subject students

as literate, able. This becomes one of the power/knowledge nexuses I'm caught up in.

Looking at the literature on constructivism that I reviewed in Chapter 2, there are certain rationalities that stand out:

- Humans don't find or discover knowledge so much as make it
- Learning is a creative process by active learners
- Social and political processes play an important role in the construction of knowledge
- Students approach tasks with learning from their own backgrounds
- Teachers should get students interested and involved in the full process of reading and writing
- Literacy skills are more easily acquired in the course of participating in socially organized activities with written language
- Learning and practice of literacy are reciprocal
- Access to meaningful literacy activities is even more important for diverse and at-risk learners
- Teachers should be sensitive to the cultures and experiences of diverse students
- Literacy instruction should be balanced – flexible groupings, multiple types of assessment, integrated, varied materials/genres, wide range of methods
- Good instruction is integrated both within language arts and between disciplines
- Good instruction is authentic and has real-world application
- Teachers should provide temporary support for tasks just out of students' reach and gradually pull back support until students are independent

For those aspiring to be good constructivist teachers, these rationalities are powerful stuff. The knowledge such teachers want to attain concerns how to do those things well. Their desire is to take up the subject position of constructivist teachers. Implied in the takeup of the position of good teacher, however, are students who are taking up the position of good (constructivist) learners. This discourse of constructivism is a powerful one in the self-contained classroom. To be recognized as good students,

Colby, Jennifer, Michael, and Ramon have to be read as creative, active knowledge makers, and have to participate in socially organized literacy activities, draw upon their experiences and cultures, participate in many different types of groups and activities, and desire independence.

The discourse of constructivism is not the only one operating on us, however. We're caught up in many different lines of force – the dominant special education discourse often contradicts the constructivist discourse. It also clashes with the dominant school discourse both in what happens in the regular classrooms and what the school at large seems to think should be going on in the self-contained classroom. The kids are caught up in many of the same discourses that I am, but they have the additional discourse of "learning disabled" as well as various peer discourses that work to subject them.

My task in the next section is to look at the binaries and contradictions that at one moment seem to be separate, creating situations of almost unbearable tension, and at another subtly work together so that we, teachers and students together, ensure that learning takes place as prescribed. For, just as in Foucault's theory of power relations, the classroom is not a simple scene of dominator/dominated; power circulates between us as well as on us from outside forces. An important goal of this section is to represent the complexity of implementing a constructivist curriculum in any classroom, particularly in a classroom of nontraditional learners. In order to do this I have done three types of writing, each relegated to a particular space on the page.

The core of the section has been written in the style of a *teacher's diary*. Such diaries are often used as tools for reflection in teacher education programs and teacher study groups and have also been utilized in reading methods texts (Cunningham & Allington, 1994; Moore et al, 1998). While this diary is based on factual events taken from my researcher's journal, lesson plans, emails, and work samples, it was written specifically for this chapter in order to better describe the curriculum in the self-contained classroom. It describes in a narrative format the variety of rationalities that shape curriculum design and implementation.

Running beneath some of the pages of the teacher's diary is a *subtext* intended to represent what it takes, and often what it costs, to implement a constructivist curriculum. It is no accident that this is a sub-text; these are the thoughts and emotions that run beneath the unflappable surface of the teacher-in-action. This subtext has been reconstructed from field notes and emails written between January 2000-January 2001.

A third space, one I came to think of as *theory boxes*, was created in order to further theorize experiences with curriculum, to better see how "relations of power [are] rationalized" (Foucault, 1981, p. 254). These theory boxes tease out rationalities that contradict those that we desire that nevertheless shape us in powerful ways.

This representation creates quite a bit of work for you, the reader. My purpose is to encourage you not to be swept away by the excitement of classroom experiences nor discouraged by the tensions such work often creates but to work at putting the two sides of the coin together in new ways, to become cautiously optimistic as you imagine new ways of positioning students on the margins as literate and able. My vision is not the only possible one. Let the lines of flight begin.

Teacher's Diary

FEBRUARY 2000

The dust has finally settled a bit this quarter with class lists stabilizing around fourteen students in language arts, reading, and science and eleven in math. Last quarter, I tried splitting my sixteen students into two groups for social studies and eliminating my planning period so that I could spend more personalized time with each student, but not having a planning period left me exhausted and Mrs. Lee scrambling to figure out what was going on. So we are back to teaching everyone at the same time. I'll have to see how it goes.

Since the Egypt unit in social studies worked so well before Christmas, I decided to go full swing into an integrated approach for the third nine weeks. My elementary students always reported the dinosaur unit as their favorite. I had a lot of materials I'd used with them, and I needed something that would connect with science, so I selected dinosaurs as the topic of our quarter-long explorations. Hopefully, my comfort level with the material will help ease the transition to a more integrated approach.

The principal's request that we do course syllabi rather than weekly lesson plans has helped me plan instruction for the whole nine weeks rather than week by week. Since we have to do new syllabi for every quarter, I also get to see how closely I stuck to my plans and how much did not get done. Then I just have to decide whether



Colby and Ramon drawing life-sized dinosaurs

to paste it into the new syllabus or scrap it altogether! Using the Understanding by Design (cite) framework has also helped me plan with the end in mind and connect my instruction to national standards and students' IEP's.

One thing I have not been happy with, however, is my students' reactions to the syllabus when I try to go over it with them at the beginning of each quarter. I figured that the parents might be having an equally difficult time figuring out what we would be doing in each class. The sheer amount of information required in each syllabus would be overwhelming to anyone with a reading problem. Because of these concerns, I made a "kid syllabus" to go over with the students to give them an overview of what we would be doing and how it connected across the subject areas. This syllabus was then sent home for parents to sign.

Doing a unit on dinosaurs will also allow me to use part of the Math Land curriculum I found in the back of a closet while exploring an empty classroom during a workshop held at a neighboring elementary school. After trying Saxon Math for a semester, I was tired of having to borrow books every day from the remedial math teacher and students not having access to the materials they needed to finish their assignments. It didn't help that I found the Saxon curriculum boring and the individualized pace that the students worked at frustrating. It reminded me too much of my past experiences running around from child to child explaining the same thing ten times. It also didn't allow for students to help one another effectively. I felt they were becoming too dependent on Mrs. Lee or me to explain the lesson, grade papers, etc. When the class did so well with the Algebra Project materials, I knew I would be more comfortable with a constructivist math curriculum.

The Math Land materials look exciting. First the students create a dinosaur database containing the "basic facts" for eight dinosaurs such as height and weight. Then we move outside to create life size dinosaurs on the parking lot. Students then draw dinosaurs to scale and create a mural. The unit ends with comparisons to modern-day objects and the writing of comparison riddles. It ought to be a true test of integrating reading and writing with math and science!

The potential for studying dinosaurs in science is also exciting. Using the information we gather for the dinosaur database and further research, the students will

I have a desire to be a good teacher. I have access to rationalities that tell me good teachers do whatever it takes for their students to learn, and are able to determine what will be motivating/important/interesting to their students. Good teachers provide good instruction, which should be interesting, inherently motivating, exciting, and result in a "payoff" for students. At the same time, however, conflicting rationalities say that good instruction should be individualized, sequential, and follow a carefully laid out plan and that students should comply with authority and learn the value of hard work regardless of whether or not they see the value or point of what they are learning.

All this takes place in a setting where all sorts of contradictory things are happening – the law mandates one thing (class size) which is supposed to be lower than the regular class size. The common-sense discourse of the school is that special education classes are smaller than regular classes while in actuality there are regular classes smaller than the special one. Instruction is supposed to be different but often looks like traditional whole-group instruction because of class size and lack of resources. Common-sense discourses also say that there's a lot of money in special education, but we often have to scramble for suitable materials. Regular discourses say we don't have to meet the same standards as regular ed and we're coded out on assessments, but the special education discourse stresses access to the regular curriculum and says all students must be assessed even though the assessments are inappropriate and we are coded out anyway.

In the midst of this I want to be seen as a good teacher and my students to be seen as good students. We are on display so to speak, under the normalizing gaze, and we take this up and desire normalcy. One way to this is supposed to be planning, whether it's backward design and attendance to standards or mapping out goals and objectives on an IEP. We are supposed to be able to plan success, control all the variables. Yet we operate in an environment that does not facilitate such control.

"payoff" for writing will be publishing via web page.

Studying dinosaurs in language arts and reading will let me take advantage of the wealth of materials available at lower reading levels. To address age-appropriate interest levels I will read aloud from the book *Dinotopia*. That book's lush illustrations and fantasy-style writing will appeal to many of the students' interests in those areas. Dinosaur names will provide opportunities for phonemic and morphemic analysis. The highlight of language arts, however, will be the creation of an electronic library of

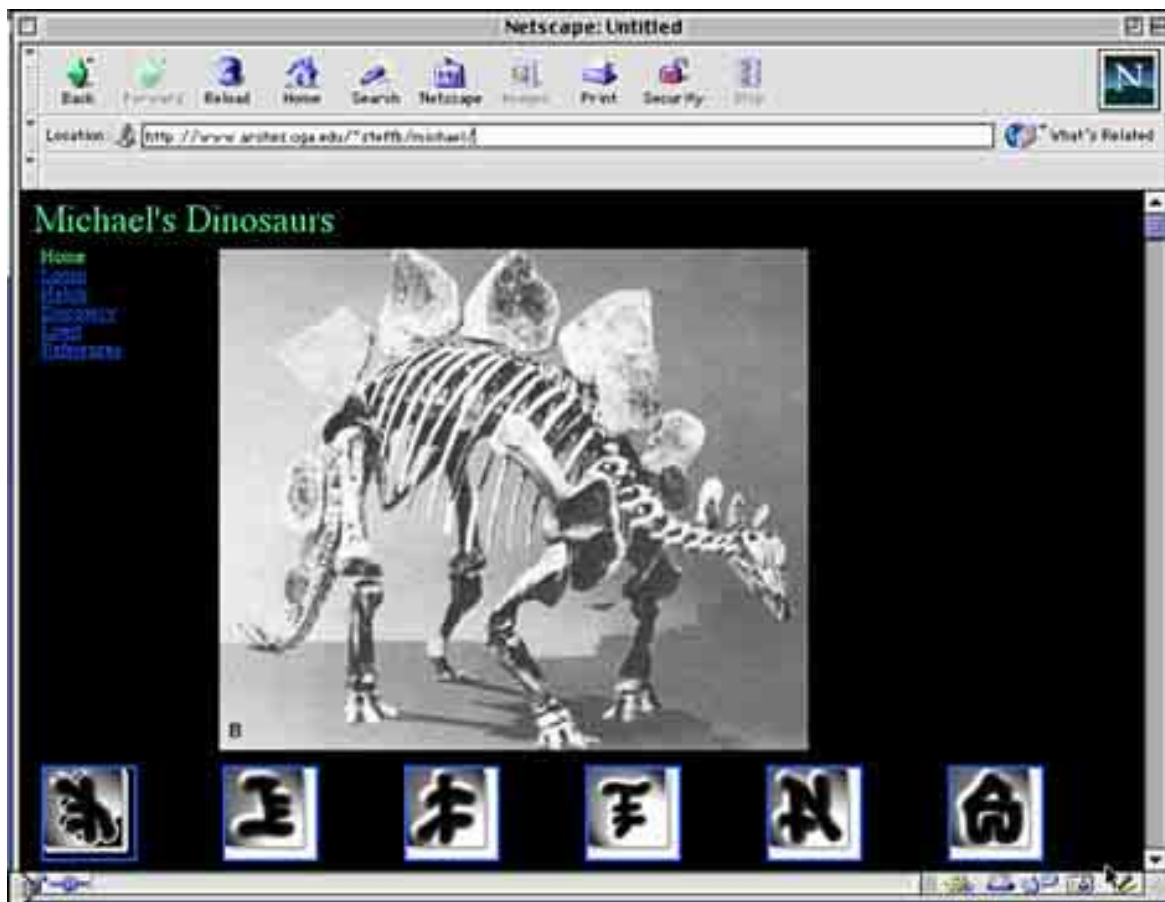
create web pages on "their" dinosaur. They will be able to use a wide variety of sources in their research, including CD-ROM encyclopedias, simulations, books, and the Internet. We haven't written a report yet, so I will scaffold their writing with graphic organizers and a prescriptive topic. Since almost everyone can write a paragraph now, I'll explain to them that a longer report is written one paragraph at a time. Using the themes of basic facts, about the discovery, habits, and the time period in which the dinosaur lived will help students organize the information they find and structure their writing. The

Field Notes 4/5/00
9th grade

Meeting with the ninth grade teachers today – I can't describe it. Frustration, fear for my children, self-doubt when I think about what and how I'm teaching- Thinking about Thomas, and Antoine, and Richard. And Bart. And about all my sixth and seventh graders and whether they really have a chance. Take Thomas out, please, before he gets here! He really does sound MID, doesn't he? Those

kids that run around, they get here and get ten tardies and they're out, fail for the year. How do kids who miss 40 days in one year in middle school get promoted to high school anyway? They don't do well at all when they get here. All our kids are tech prep. Unless they can take Algebra when they come in, otherwise they can't catch up. Really they have to decide in middle school.

Seeing the kids that are there, what they do. All the ones I saw were Black. Dark Black. Looking at the math books, wondering how the



Michael's Stegosaurus Web Site 2/00

dinosaur storybooks adapted from "easy" dinosaur books. Students will learn important skills such as scanning and recording to make HyperStudio stacks representing their books. Recording the text will provide authentic reasons to reread for fluency. Creating activities to go with their storybooks will also provide students with authentic reasons to engage in lower-level phonics and comprehension activities. My goal is to burn a CD-ROM containing the storybooks and activities to present to an elementary school.

Looking back on my plans and goals for this unit, I am excited and ready to get started! I think that all the activity will help keep boredom at bay. I hope they will keep Colby engaged, give Ramon enough opportunities for challenge, and encourage Michael and Jennifer to continue to work together.

APRIL 2000

Well, the dinosaur unit had some successes and some failures. I suppose all units do, but I am disappointed by what I perceive as a waste of valuable time in some areas. On the other hand, in some ways the students seem to be surging ahead. I wish that I could balance our successes and failures better. I guess that's not altogether true – what I wish is that everything we did was highly successful! I continue to feel the burden of limited time in which to cover so much that they need. I have to constantly remind myself that it is not possible for every student to gain the three or four grade levels that my students need to gain to become even close to grade level. I still keep wishing that they could, though.

The kids' web pages turned out great. As usual the class seemed to divide itself into three groups. There's one that always finishes everything on time and gets to do more of the "fun" stuff like looking for pictures to go with their writing or spend extra time designing their web page. Then there's a middle group of students who get things done but need some prodding or extra time in order to do a good job. They get finished with the written part of the assignment in enough time to do most of the fun things but not to the extent that the faster group does. Then there's a group that Mrs. Lee and I call the "clueless group." I try hard not to let them know I feel that way, but I think all the kids pick up on the fact that certain students annoy me. Of course, these are often the students that annoy all of us! This is the group that three weeks into the assignment can't tell me what they are supposed to be doing, spend most of their time off task playing, bothering others, or staring into space, lose their work, lose their disks, and really do not seem to understand the material, what they are supposed to do with it, or why they would want to do these things. Some of these students are also the ones who like to engage me in a debate on the worth of the assignment or categorize the lesson as

kids I have that are at a first and second grade level right now are going to do when they stick a calculator in their hands and have them do pre-algebra. What about Bart, and Timothy, Jennifer and Mike? They don't teach them "how to read" anymore. They only have that one period, language arts, and they have to practice for that five paragraph essay on the graduation test...so what if they need more than one period for reading? I just saw kids copying out of dictionaries. Wednesday is Vocabulary Day.

And yet they were so interested, and nice. I had fun talking to them. They wanted to know what kind of math projects we were doing, and didn't laugh when I said "dinosaurs." And all the pride and love I

have for my kids came up to the surface as I thought about what all we've done and how much they've grown, even if they still can't subtract with regrouping or divide with uneven remainders. And I remember that, yes, Jawan did learn to do two digit multiplication finally. And I want to know that someone else will be able to see them, what they can do, how smart they are, their strengths and weaknesses and push them to do more, to inquire, not to coast, to be creative. And I think of the system and how it's set up and wonder if everything I've pushed for so hard and so long this year will ever be needed in the places they're going. And I don't know if what I've done has been good or bad.



Colby and Jawan doing using the text reader



Ramon, Mike and Jenny researching in the computer lab

"weird." Perhaps to them it is! The "clueless group" rarely finishes the written part of the assignment, and they usually reach a point where I stop them and have them do one of the "fun things" so that they aren't totally left out of what the class is doing. I'm also hoping they catch on that if they finish the first part of the project in a timely fashion they could spend most of their time doing the fun stuff. This is the group that worries me the most, probably because they are often the students I dislike the most. Sometimes I wonder, what comes first?

I also felt the math unit was successful, but it took a lot of scaffolding and support on my part to pull it off. I was observed by the principal during one lesson and he wrote that he felt the lesson was too hard, but the looks on the students' faces when they got it were delightful to see. I thought, welcome to my world! I'm still not sure the kids understand how to draw something to a given scale, but I think they realize how big the dinosaurs were in relation to each other and to themselves. They also surprised me with how well they were able to write dinosaur riddles like "which dinosaur was half as long as a school bus and three times as tall as a person?" Michael was so tickled when he finally understood what he was supposed to do and went on to write riddles that stumped Mrs. Lee!

It was a good thing that the math and science units were successful, because the reading/language arts class seemed like a total bust. Most of the kids liked Dinotopia, but some fell asleep what seemed like every day. The biggest fiasco, however, was the storybook library. I think the main problems were the lack of time and lack of technology – no matter what organizational structure I came up with (and it was a dizzying array), we

just could not scan in the picture books, record the text, and type the text under the picture in Hyperstudio. The next time I get one of these big ideas, I think I should look at the technology we have available and plan accordingly. Our poor three computers just could not support sixteen students making storybooks, especially since only two of them would run Hyperstudio and one of those was an IBM and the other a Mac. We also had to go across the school to scan, which meant either Mrs. Lee went and had problems with the scanner, or I went and the kids had problems with Hyperstudio. Then the microphone stopped working on the IBM and I could never figure out why, the kids refused to reread their books for fluency when they were supposed to – it was a mess and there was nothing to show for it. Even though I decided I'll be coming back to Southside next year, I still feel pressured to teach the kids everything they need to know, and when things don't work it just makes me feel that much more under pressure.

AUGUST 2000

Here August is almost over and I'm finally just getting starting to teach my class. Since which class I would be teaching and who would be in each class was so unsettled at the beginning of the school year, I started this year much differently than I have in the past. I made my orders based on what I had decided from my experiences last year with the expectation that I would get my old class back, rather than on observations I've been making of the students I had the first few weeks. Now I have my "old class" back and they know my rules and procedures from last year, so basically we're where we would be

The discourse of planning and the rationality that good planning brings good results is very powerful. I spend a lot of time planning, thinking about what will occur, envisioning it, and reflecting on plans that go awry. Although I say I disagree with the discourse of functionalism and the emphasis on predicting results and modifying behaviors, the idea that my plans can shape learning behaviors is seductive.

The tension between individuality and community is obvious here. The norms and standards for "acceptable progress" differ between discourses. Regular education discourse hopes for one year's gain for one year's instruction. Special education discourse says six months gain for a year's instruction is all that can be hoped for. My anxiety and desire that students approach the "norm" of "grade level" makes me dissatisfied with two years' gain for one year's instruction. The dominant discourse says that my students are "too far" behind.

The discourse of teaching as a caring profession is also evident. I feel guilty that there are students I dislike, that frustrate me. The term "clueless group" could never be spoken aloud; just writing it makes me feel that readers will judge me. My reading of them is that they cannot get it right as students, although over the course of the study all of the kids I originally deemed clueless leave the self-contained program. So who was really clueless? These students got what some of the others desperately wanted.

The discussion about technology and "making it work" sounds like the humanist idea of agency – woman against the power structure of the school system. I kept insisting that I needed more (and better) technology and was told I was lucky to have what I had. The discourse? Be grateful for what you have. Know your place. Don't rock the boat. If you refuse, we'll use our power to remind you of your place in the power structure by sending disciplinary notices to the principal. My circumventing them and getting computers from the university was a form of resistance, but a sad one. The computers were already old, leftover. Then all year I'd tell the kids they didn't have the right to demand that they work better, faster, they should be grateful for what they had. Look who was reproducing the power structure.

"Back to school" contains many powerful rationalities, a primary one involving getting to know the students you will be teaching. In special education, this means reading student records to determine hours and subjects to be served and plan instruction. The first few weeks of school are to be spent pretesting to determine if students regressed over the summer.

Another back to school discourse involves rules – class rules and procedures and review of the system discipline code. The discourse of the school, however, seems to be one of chaos. Everyone waits for the ten day count so that teachers and students can be shuffled, positions can shift, and teams reconfigured. The student discourse is probably about how ridiculous it is to talk about rules and how they will be consistently enforced when everyone - kids, teachers, administrators - knows that after Labor Day everything will be changing around.

Mrs. Lee's rationalities are important and not directly addressed anywhere else. She represents tradition to me, as well as what I think of as old fashioned black teacher wisdom. She engages me frequently in discussions about why I am doing certain things and how things were different when she was in school. We disagree on a lot but we also respect each other a lot. I am white and have a lot of degrees, and I am "the teacher." She is black and educated in another discipline, and she is "the aide." But she is also older, has more experience with children, has cultural experiences that are different than mine and in some ways like those of the students, and has a lot in common with many of the parents. Most of my knowledge about how to teach comes from books, and I believe that what Mrs. Lee has to say has as much potential to work as something someone in the ivory tower has to say. Our discussions do a lot to inform my teaching and have led to the inclusion of some strategies that I have my doubts about in relation to what I've read but are important culturally to a large percentage of my students and their parents.

Administrator discourses are also present and shape the landscape of the classroom. Older, more experienced teachers make the most appropriate mentors and are expected to ease new teachers' induction to the teaching profession. The discourse of differential diagnosis is blown out of the water here by my administrator - self contained LD and resource LD and BD students are mixed together, resulting in a very wide range in learning characteristics, behaviors, academic levels. Within the administrator discourse, good teachers pitch in and help within the school community, accept administrators' authority, and respond flexibly to change.

activity that left us all breathless in its wake. My unrealized goal of finishing my dissertation also had me worried that I would be spending much of my time outside of school writing and would have little time left over for the extensive planning required by a "project only" curriculum.

That said, I was worried about how the class would respond to more traditional instruction in light of how poorly they had done with those activities in the past. With funds left over from the 99-00 special education budget I had purchased small group sets of Scholastic's basal spelling program on the second and third grade levels and one book from the fourth and fifth grade levels for previewing by the department. I had also purchased Creative Publication's Math Land curriculum for the third grade level based on students' post test scores and the support they had needed to complete activities from the series' fourth grade curriculum. That left social studies. My goal was to take my class on a trip to Washington, D.C.. and find a textbook that would support our learning about

if I had all new students with an important caveat: we have a history together.

A whole summer of reflection gave me the time I needed to realize there was some truth to Mrs. Lee's observations that we were always doing too many big projects and never had enough time to finish everything. We'd also talked about how the children did seem to need some more traditional activities, both to keep them in touch with the demands of the regular classroom should they return, and to avoid a non-stop frenzy of

U.S. history. This textbook would be culturally sensitive, be easy to use for guided reading activities, have a version on tape or CD-ROM, and not bore the students. My dilemma was obvious. After doing some research, I decided on McMillan-McGraw Hill's text *The United States*, a fifth/sixth grade level book.

All of my prior planning helped me be ready when I was told a new teacher was transferring into the resource position and I would be teaching my class and hers in order to ease her transition. Modifying the Four Blocks structure, we now go into self-selected reading (SSR) as the students enter the classroom in the morning. Our version of SSR involves the students rotating to a different station of what I call "directed choice" each day, including a reading center, computer reading, Internet, guided reading, and response. Our technology pains have been eased somewhat by surplus computers made available for my research by the University. SSR is supposed to last thirty minutes, after which we go into a modified words block, which we call spelling. I've been focusing on spelling procedures these first few weeks as well as word wall activities, but after the kids get the hang of the spelling books we will have time for activities like Making Words and word sorts. I had envisioned Mrs. Lee and I running the spelling groups, but now that she is split between two classes I'm on my own for reading/language arts. I think this will help the kids become more independent, at least in spelling, and when they are in SSR they work independently anyway. So far they seem to like having spelling books of their own to work out of.

The Math Land materials also seem to be working out pretty well. I'm still feeling my way with all of the components, and it seems like we never have enough time to do everything the book calls for. I find this especially troubling because it's a third grade curriculum and my kids are 6th-8th graders, and our math period is ninety minutes long. One thing I really like about the materials is how much the students need to read and write in order to complete each task. Although they are having trouble right now figuring out what they are supposed to do, I think that before the year is out they will be able to do the activities independently. I also have noticed that the workbooks have several of the features that I did like in the Saxon math program, such as working on the same types of problem all year long and a focus on word problems. Now I don't have to feel guilty for not doing Saxon!

I decided to use social studies to do modified guided reading and writing blocks, focusing on reading and writing in the content areas. Traditionally an important difference between resource and self-contained students is where they learn science and social studies – in the regular or special education classroom. Since this is the area in which they usually "go out" in first, I feel a responsibility to teach textbook strategies. Until our textbooks come in though, we will be working on projects related to our field trip. The first project I have planned involves biographies of famous people buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Since we wrote our dinosaur reports last year, I'm confident the kids can write a biographical report. I'm curious to see how much they remember from last year about doing research.

Field Notes 9/15/00
The Librarian

I was in the library trying to find some books to use for my timeline project, and the librarian was saying something that made me think twice. It had something to do with the sources they would be using – she recommended that they use big books that had some of everything so it would be easy to find their information – they wouldn't have to look at a lot of different sources. Since they were LD, she

said, they needed more focus or they'd be "all over the place." And my first thought was, that sounded so icky, like there was one right answer and I wanted to make it easy for them to find it. It made me really think about what I want them to be able to do, to take a whole lot of disparate resources – trade books, nonfiction skinny sources on very specific topics, encyclopedias, the internet, multimedia CD-Roms, and all the rest, and sift through them and consolidate important facts. My conception of the project was so different from hers that I just didn't



Michael, Colby, and Jennifer at the FDR Memorial

OCTOBER 2000

Using the modified Four Blocks seems to be working out pretty well. It seems to balance our need for both traditional and “weird” assignments, as the kids call them. SSR is working well, spelling is now up and running, and the workbooks from the MathLand curriculum finally came in. So far everyone seems to be appropriately challenged.

Everything else, however, pales in comparison with the excitement over our upcoming trip to Washington. It now seems that it will indeed become reality. We will be flying there, staying three days, and flying back. I wake up in the night sometimes worrying about all the potential disasters. To get ready, we’re making sheets to take with us on all the places we’ll be going. Each child has picked a monument to report on and will write two paragraphs, one including general information on the monument and another on the person or event commemorated. Under that goes five “fast facts” and five things to look for and check off while we’re there. Hopefully these reports, combined with the biography stories each child wrote, will give them a foundation to build on in our whirlwind tour of the city. I can think of worse things to do while we’re waiting for our textbooks to come in!

say anything for a few minutes. Then I just laughed, and said, “It’s amazing that we can actually get anything done in a way because it always seems like I do things the wrong way for LD kids, and yet somehow they do manage to pull things together!” I think she was a little put off, but I guess her telling me how to teach my class wasn’t supposed to be offensive.

Field Notes 9/15/00

Determination

Today was the half day for parent conferences. Lindsey and I went out at lunchtime to eat sushi and I had a big glass of wine and tell her about some of the kids in the class. We hung out there and ate way too much and then it was back to school – progress reports just totally strewn everywhere, things a

Arlington Cemetery



- Arlington National Cemetery was made officially as a military Cemetery June 15, 1864 by secretary of war Edwin M. Stanton.
- More than 260,000 people are buried at Arlington Cemetery.
- The Flags in Arlington National Cemetery are flown at half-staff from a half hour before the first funeral until a half hour after the last funeral each day.
- Funerals, including interments and inurnment, average 20 a day.
- The tomb of the unknowns is one of the most visited sites at Arlington National Cemetery.

Arlington Cemetery is a tourist site. Four million people go to visit each year. Everybody who is buried there gets a headstone and gets the headstones marked. The people get a casket and there are more than 319,000 caskets buried there. The people buried at The National Cemetery are resting in place in memorials. Only certain people can get buried in the Arlington Cemetery. The people who went through the training but never served on active duty can be buried. The people who are retired from active military service with armed forces can be buried there. The people who were in the Armed Forces can be buried there. People who want to visit the grave of a veteran of the Armed Forces can go to the Arlington Cemetery.

- ☐ Tomb of the unknowns
- ☐ Joe Louis
- ☐ John F Kennedy
- ☐ John F Kennedy's wife
- ☐ John F Kennedy's son

This section reflects my interest in the discourses of student choice and motivation. I have been teaching the students that they have access to rationalities of student choice, and they are now using this knowledge to get into the classes they desire in the school. They are countering my rationality that my having the planning period I want is more beneficial to them than being in classes with students closer to their own ages.

Another example of the rationality of student choice is provided by the students' use of a democratic process to select the textbook chapters they will study. I encourage this because of the access I have to the rationality that student choice is motivating and leads to increased "buy-in" to the curriculum. The Lionel Tate lesson also deals with student choice/expression. My willingness to try a new type of lesson stemmed from the students' opinions that traditional responses to literature activities were "boring." They complied but complained. In their responses to various web texts, they align themselves with "adult" rationalities that pro wrestling might not be good for young children, yet think such programs are appropriate for themselves.

Student engagement remains a powerful rationality and seems at times more important than accuracy. In mathematics I hope that more student engagement will lead to increased levels of accuracy. This reveals my belief that accuracy, reflected in grades, is a worthwhile goal. That kids should buy into grades as a reflection of progress and desire good grades seems very rational. We buy into numeric symbols of "progress," find reasons for not doing well, set goals and take steps to meet those goals.

I continue to be powerfully influenced by the inclusion discourse and continue to try to gain access to the regular science classroom. In this discourse, instruction by regular education subject area specialists and exposure to regular education peers are deemed valuable and less restrictive than instruction in a special education setting.

JANUARY 2001

Things are really cooking now. I was worried about the new year starting because after numerous discussions with the students about how much they hated going to sixth grade exploratories, I decided they could go with the eighth graders. Since eighth grade exploratories (and teacher planning) falls during the first block, that means once my planning is over I have no more breaks the rest of the day. So far, though, it seems to be O.K. I also thought we would be going to a regular eighth grade class for science, but that's been put on hold until the fourth nine weeks.

The class seems to be changing a lot from the time I first met them. We can now have class discussions and they participate. Most of them even stay awake! We're doing read-alouds more often now. We've started reading *Flowers for Algernon* and they seem to be enjoying it and mention incidents that happened in the book throughout the day. I've also started to expand the response lessons that we do during SSR on Wednesdays. Last week I had them do a discussion web on the topic "Watching pro wrestling is bad for young children." I had them split into three groups, gave them a

mess, juice stains on Demetrius' desk, the whole nine yards. And then to top off an already crazy day is the parent meeting for Washington D.C.. Omarr's mom comes, then Stuart's, Zach from next door's dad, Colby's mom who the secretary told to come to the wrong room. And Beth and Lacey show up and start downing the whole thing! We don't have enough time, kids don't have enough money, we have to get together \$3,000 by next week, etc. etc. Start trying to change around MY trip! The one I've been working on all year! Want to go in the spring!

As if parents are going to be able to cough up more money then! I don't know why I ever even opened it up to them, I should have just stuck with my little class and taken a van and screw the rest of the school! Beth didn't even call any of her parents. Two of mine already paid the deposit, three showed up to the meeting out of the seven parents I called! Then when I wouldn't just give up right away Beth jumped on the bandwagon and starting talking up raising money, asking for money from special ed, all the rest, like it was her initiative that was going



The Blue Group practices for their spelling test: Carlos, Michael, and Colby

graphic organizer, and had them rotate through three web sites I'd found on Lionel Tate, a thirteen year old boy found guilty of killing a six year old girl whose defense had been he was "intoxicated by wrestling." After each group had filled out their organizers we came together to decide (surprisingly to me) that watching pro wrestling was bad for young children, who they decided were "not teenagers."

I've done a little better at sticking with the word wall, but not much. We usually do it once or twice a week after we introduce the new words. The problem can't be time, because with our new schedule fifteen minutes has been added to the 90 minute reading/language arts block. I need to figure out what the problem is and work to solve it.

Math is bothering me too. The grades from the second nine weeks were low – no A's and B's, and four kids failed. I'm having the kids who failed work at the back with Mrs. Lee so she can keep them on task. I also showed the class the grades and how they were lower than their grades in the other subjects, and talked over the reasons they had done poorly – not completing assignments, completing assignments incorrectly, and losing work they had completed. Everyone then wrote a personal goal for math. So far everyone seems to be concentrating more and fooling around less, but the nine weeks is still young.

to get the whole thing started! I was so relieved when Stuart's mom stayed after to ask the tour guy for the information to put on the raffle tickets. He and she were both real encouraging and it made me think that everyone knew that I was the one that was going to make things happen. Somehow I feel like trying to get the \$3,000 deposit myself just to show them what can be done when you're DETERMINED to do something!

Our books FINALLY came in in social studies. Now that it's time to do science! I decided we would still do social studies because I want to use all the new materials. Looking at the schedule and figuring in how long it usually takes us to complete things, I decided we would only have enough time to cover five chapters. I had no idea which ones to select – they all seemed fascinating – so I had the students do it. I told them to look through the books and pick the chapter that they thought looked the most interesting. I also showed them all the support materials and teacher's book of ideas for projects that went with each chapter. Each student then had to present their chapter and convince the class to select their chapter over the others. I went first because I had already bought some extra materials to go with the chapter on Columbus. The kids selected seven chapters to vote on and then ranked their top five. Some of those little suckers didn't even vote for mine! It was one of the ones selected in the end, along with ancient western civilizations, the industrial revolution, the Civil War, and the Civil Rights Movement. So far everyone has been engaged in the textbook activities, although their accurate completion of assignments isn't quite there yet. I've also had to split up the group listening to the text on tape as they were more into playing with the machine than reading.

Overall, though, so far this school year is going well. My case load has stayed low, around ten students, with eight kids in reading/language arts, nine in social studies, and ten in math. The kids I have now primarily have learning problems as opposed to many of my students from last year whose problems were more behavioral. I've been able to relax my focus on "law and order" in the classroom and concentrate on actually teaching, and the results are starting to show up in the learning behaviors of the students. Yesterday they managed their own reading groups while I entered grades into the computer with my back turned toward them most of the time. While this is not something I would want to do often, I was happy they were so independent. Mrs. Lee had run an errand and when she returned, she commented on how well they were doing and noted that they had behaved similarly a few days before when I had been absent. On another day I was absent they spent the whole day working on their projects, something Mrs. Lee was uncomfortable doing the year before when I was gone, when we gave them lots of worksheets to do quietly. At this rate I'm curious to see what they're like by May!

And So...

Chapter Four is a complicated chapter. First and foremost, it contains a lot of information: a description of the classroom, introductions to the kids, discussions about curriculum. Circling through it all are many different discourses. Realist tales describe the children and the classroom. Children are described in term of grade equivalents, are said to regress, take tests in such subskills as word attack, have relative strengths, and carry labels such as communication disordered, autistic, ADHD and developmentally delayed. Throughout the chapter is evidence of the system's, and my own, obsession with "progress." The inclusion of the theory boxes troubles the dominant discourses of narrative and functionalism in order to trace their affects both in the curriculum and in our literate practices.

The discourse of constructivism is there too, subtly at first and then becoming more obvious. Desks arranged in small groups, multicultural literature, inquiry-based projects, awareness of students' backgrounds and the experiences they bring to literacy tasks, and an interest in the relationships between students in the first sections lead to a more explicit discussion of constructivist rationalities in relation to the curriculum of the self-contained class. It is in this section as well that I begin to theorize the tensions of trying to be a constructivist teacher in a setting where other discourses are dominant. To do so I call upon poststructural theory, particularly Foucault's theory of power relations, in an effort to see how contradictory discourses work to subject us as teacher and students and our desires to be read as "getting it right" in these positions.

The curriculum is described as (primarily) constructivist but becomes poststructural when it is able to open up spaces for students to be read as literate and able. Contours of the relationship between power/knowledge and subjectification begin to take form here in Chapter Four in order that the shape can emerge further through the stories and discussions in Chapters Five and Six. Even when contradictory rationalities are not specifically cited, they always operate around us as lines of force that at best we attempt to ride or step around and at worst pierce and bisect us in places we were often unaware of.

Chapter Four represents a case study of a teacher, four particular students, and their work in the context of a particular middle school classroom for students labeled SLD. It is in some ways a realist tale, but one is left to wonder exactly whose reality is represented, and how reality shapes our practice. With a pride that is probably felt only by teachers, it seems clear to me that Colby, Jennifer, Michael, and Ramon are indeed literate and able. Or, at the very least, they are not *illiterate* or *disabled*. They are beginning to emerge as students who are simultaneously both and neither literate and illiterate, able and disabled. Looking back over conflicting journal entries, work samples, and images of students in action, the binarial categories of regular/special, normal/abnormal, or smart/dumb start to break down a bit, to deconstruct.

While this chapter tells some stories, there are many more that could have been told. Chapters Five and Six tell new stories, and new versions of stories now old. Stories of celebration and resistance, of children "getting it right" as students in the midst of circumstances that make an eclipse of their positioning as "SLD" almost impossible. What sustains us on such a trip? Can we imagine a laughing teacher continuing the joyfulness of a laughing mother? Come dance the spiral dance, splash with students in a simulated sea. Who will be your partner in this journey? That laughing teacher who is me.

CHAPTER 5

FIGHTING BACK: STORIES OF RESISTANCE AND LITERATE PRACTICE

My keenest sense in the writing of this chapter is the many different directions I could have gone with it, the gulf between the totality of possible statements and the finitude of what is actually written or spoken. The structuring impulse I have settled on is to craft four narrative vignettes, to tell four different “stories” about my data. (Lather, 1991, p. 123)

Introduction

In Chapters One through Four, I discussed the goals for this study. One goal involved describing practices that would provide others an opportunity to see themselves reflected in the common experiences that teachers and students share regardless of their placements and labels. The other was to describe transgressive experiences that worked to reduce the alienation and isolation of being located on the margins and opened up possibilities for students to be subjected as literate and able.

There is tension inherent in taking up the position of good (constructivist) educator and deconstructing that approach in order to enable the students to see the discourses that position them and do something different. The discourse of the “good special educator” becomes part of this deconstruction as I attempt to flip the good/bad binary of pull-out special education services. Many share the view that such services are harmful because of the resulting poor student outcomes, and so my first step of deconstruction included attempting to make the self-contained classroom experience

superior to those found in the regular classroom. This is the “good special education” discourse, and it supports the idea of special education as a necessary practice and part of schooling-as-usual. The discourse of the “good special educator,” however, becomes problematic. For me to read students as literate and able is one thing. But for students to be read as successful by the larger school community, they must be read as good students within many different and often contradictory discourses. While some may say that my desire for my students to be read as successful is a humanist goal, I am happy enough to use poststructural theory in any way that can help students become less marginalized.

Part of the schooling-as-usual discourse may be to wonder how students’ learning behaviors could be so anomalous. My assumption is that students are contradictory because they are constituted through contradictory discourses. When framed this way, it is not surprising that students can be successful students while at the same time poor readers and writers. I see Colby, Jennifer, Michael, and Ramon as successfully drawing on different discursive practices to position themselves in ways that I recognize as legitimate (and that others and they themselves recognize as legitimate).

When students with learning disabilities are framed in the rationalist, functionalist discourses of schooling-as-usual, it is difficult to understand how one individual could seem as contradictory as these students often do. One example of such a contradiction is a student who can read and comprehend complex books yet cannot spell three-letter words correctly. Another student might participate in classroom discussions, give detailed oral presentations, and build intricate three dimensional models but be unable to remember how to write his own name or dial his home phone number. Schooling-as-usual values particular types of learning behaviors, such as being able to sit still for long periods of

time, comprehend information presented orally, obtain information from text silently in isolation, memorize discrete facts, and express ideas in standard written English. Those who cannot or will not engage in such behaviors are not often read as successful.

There are many contradictory discourses surrounding the topic of literacy. Literacy instruction is often characterized as either whole language or phonics-based. The reading of one particular type of text, such as classical literature, might be valued over informational texts, comic books, or romance magazines. Silent reading may be considered appropriate for adolescents and subvocalization or partner reading deemed inappropriate. Instruction may require that students master subskills in isolation before going on to connected text. Reading skill might be measured by state mandated tests, informal reading inventories, running records, commercially distributed computer-based tests, or through writing prompts. Any student might be expected to appear more or less literate depending on how literacy is defined, but for students with learning disabilities the disparity is often larger. A student who is unable to read or answer comprehension questions from a preprimer passage on an Informal Reading Inventory might turn to the Internet and successfully discuss findings from the NBA homepage with a friend. Can such a student be described as literate?

Influences

This chapter was created to portray the experiences of Colby, Jennifer, Michael, and Ramon in the context of the self-contained classroom and to look at those experiences through a poststructural frame. This framework has been particularly informed by the work of Bronwyn Davies (2000) and Cath Laws (Davies & Laws, 2000)

(Laws, 2001). Data stories are categorized and bracketed with discussion, creating a text woven together from theory and practice.

While I originally decided to use the figuration of the “sprial dance” in the title of chapter six, it has since worked its way into many other parts of this dissertation. It becomes relevant here to describe the influence on my research of Bronwyn Davies, particularly work that she has done with one of her students, Cath Laws. The most obvious influence of their work on mine is in the discourse they use, a discourse that I take up here in order to theorize my experiences and the experiences of my students. I cannot remember the first time I read of a school in Australia for students with severe emotional and behavior disorders in what must have been an earlier version of an article reprinted in a collection of Davies’ works from 1990-2000 (Davies, 2000). I know that I read it while teaching students labeled emotionally/behavior disordered (EBD), so it must have been before I had heard of Davies or poststructural feminism. I remember feeling the power of the language used in that article, my first glimmer that my story was part of a collective story. I did not think of the article again, however, until almost ten years later when I was trying to read everything that Davies had written. Rereading that article hit me hard. I knew that the theories discussed there had influenced not only my teaching, but also my desire “to apply poststructuralism in a place where other discourses are dominant” (Laws, 2001).

My initial reading of that article was the first time that my path danced alongside Davies’. The next time occurred in 1998 as I listened to Davies present at the QUIG conference and discussed how I had heard of postmodernism with a classmate. As I wrote about that incident in Chapter Two, I became curious about what Davies’ speech had

actually contained to grab my attention so thoroughly and emailed her to see if she had a hard copy of what she had said. She did not, but she forwarded my email to one of her students whose work was similar to mine, Cath Laws, who became a peer debriefer for this study. Corresponding with Cath via email provided many opportunities for me to practice the taking up of poststructural discourse as it applied to my own work.

What was so powerful about the discourse Davies and Laws used in their application of poststructural theory in Australian classrooms? They spoke of students being subjected, that is, formed as particular kinds of subjects within the various discourses surrounding them. The subject's potential to rewrite him or herself is key to understanding subjection:

The speaking /writing subject can go beyond the intentions of powerful others and beyond the meanings of the discourses through which they are subjected while *necessarily and at the same time* being dependent on their successful subjection for becoming someone who can speak/write meaningfully and convincingly beyond the terms of their subjection.

(Davies and Laws, 2000, p.146-147)

It is the successful subjection of Colby, Jennifer, Michael, and Ramon that I look at here, how they become subjected as students and speak meaningfully beyond the terms of their subjection as illiterate/disabled. This concept, and other terms surrounding it, are discussed further in the section below.

The Individual and Subjection

Earlier chapters of this dissertation introduced the contradictory, discontinuous, often fractured subject of poststructuralism and the reconfiguration of traditional theories

of identity into that of a relational, constantly displaced/replaced subjectivity. The term *subject* is used in poststructuralism and does not have the same meaning as “individual” or “person,” terms that are used in humanistic discourses. Butler (1997) emphasizes that “the genealogy of the subject as a critical category, however, suggests that the subject, rather than be identified strictly with the individual, ought to be designated as a linguistic category, a placeholder, a structure in formation” (p. 10). She characterizes the process of becoming a subject as one of uneasiness and risk.

The process of becoming a subject is described as *subjection*. “‘Subjection’ signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power” (Butler, 1997, p. 2). The role of power in the process of subjection is reciprocal in nature. Power is exerted on the subject but is in turn assumed by the subject, thus becoming a key element in the subject’s becoming. Although the word subjection often has a negative connotation, in poststructuralism “being subjected can make available a power that rests on being recognizable and, in particular, being recognizable as legitimately taking oneself up in recognizable and laudable ways” (Davies & Laws, 2000, p. 163). The subject is seen a passionately attached to his or her own subordination, which leads some to say that the subject is therefore responsible for their subordination. Butler, however, sees this attachment as produced through the workings of power.

Once one has been subordinated by power and is recognizable, he or she is said to be *subjected*. A person who has been successfully subjected is recognized as “getting it right” within a particular discourse. “A poststructuralist reading must take account of the psychic energy of the subjected being and what it is that they are doing with the imposed structures or discourses” (Davies & Laws, 2000, p. 163). This account, that is, the

feelings, thoughts, and sense of self in the spaces made available through particular discourses is described as *subject position*. Specifically, this is "the subjectively experienced positioning of a category made available in the discursive practices through which one is constituted" (Davies & Hunt, 1994, par. 61). The thoughts, feelings, sense of self and ways in which one sees the world is *subjectivity*.

Weedon (1997) provides an example of how these terms come together in her discussion of poststructural theory's application to feminist practice. Many women are familiar with the feeling of being a different person in various social situations. The range of ways of "being a woman" is broad, but certain behaviors are expected by different subject positions such as wife, employee, mother, or fashion model. Individual women may embrace, reject, or resist these subject positions and the subjectivity that accompanies them, yet resistance is always "from the position of an alternative social definition of femininity. In patriarchal societies we cannot escape the implications of femininity" (p. 83).

A similar example can be provided in the context of this study. The range of ways of being a student are also quite broad. While the range available to students labeled learning disabled is perhaps not as broad, a wide variety of subject positions are still available, subject positions such as hard worker, class clown, tutor, teacher's pet, bully, or group leader. While individual students may take up any of these positions at different times, doing so often becomes a form of resistance from the position of an alternative social definition of disability. In the larger society of the school, we cannot escape the implications of disability.

This chapter looks not only at students' abilities to become successfully subjected as defined by the dominant discourses of schooling, but how "the takeup of poststructuralist discourse enables a radical disruption of the taken-for-granted readings of educational practices, so opening up moments in which the participants can go beyond the conditions of their subjection" (Davies & Laws, 2000, p. 164). Rethinking identity as subjectivity means that individuals are no longer locked into one "true" self, required to be the same in every situation. Rather, after being successfully subjected, one can work from that position to create new opportunities and ways of being in the world. In this case, once a child is recognized as a "good student," her presentation of herself to others as competent and successful is accepted, and she gains a certain amount of power by being seen that way. In schools, "good students" may be allowed to help others, avoid more menial tasks in favor of "enrichment," run errands, and so forth. By agreeing to play by the rules, she is let in the game.

With these theories in mind, I began looking through the data with an eye to how the children were getting it right as students, readers, and writers, or in other words, how they were able to read and write texts from a wide variety of sources and take up the subject position of "good students." Which practices allowed them to go beyond the conditions of their subjection as disabled/illiterate? As a result of this process, at least three practices emerged:

- Helping others, engaging in research, and working hard are practices that the students and teachers have come to see as useful in the struggle to reposition themselves as literate/able

- Performing themselves as subjected helps the participants allow the teacher, tasks, and curriculum to shape their literate practices
- Using technology helps the participants “get it right” as students

These three practices intersected with the theories I continued to bring to the data and shaped my analysis. What is “poststructural” about this analysis is a way of seeing, of finding ways in the midst of their minute-by-minute struggles with literacy that students were able to get it right. New ways of looking at the subject and at students as constantly going through the process of subjection made the idea that they occupied many different subject positions simultaneously easier to accept and the formation of new subject positions less daunting. Something had to happen to open up moments where the students could begin to go beyond what lay behind them, histories filled only with evidence of their disabilities. The standard discourse had to be disrupted in order to find ways that students were able/literate as well as disabled/illiterate. I had long thought the school played a role in the “disturbed” behaviors of my students labeled EBD. I began to wonder if this could be true of students labeled “learning disabled” as well.

Poststructural theory would say that there is no one Truth, but rather many truths, that deconstruction involves looking at the way we come to see particular ideas as truths. How is it that we have come to see students who have a difficult time learning school subjects as other than “normal?” How do transgressive ways of seeing how students come to be positioned as LD affect my sense of working with students differently? In Chapter Two, I discussed Foucault’s (1975/1979) theory of normalization and ways that disciplinary power works to subject students as normal or abnormal. Through the use of hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement, and the examination, students who

struggle to read and write come to be positioned as abnormal or LD. I have long felt that submitted to the same process as my students, many if not most students could be determined ‘abnormal’ according to the guidelines for various special education programs. Perhaps this feeling led to my views that the discourse of the “good” (humanist/rationalist/constructivist) educator contains many useful strategies and that the use of such strategies might lead to my students being able to be read as something other than abnormal. The discourse of special education claims that the nature of students with disabilities mandates specialized instruction that differs significantly from that found in regular education classrooms; indeed, this is written into eligibility forms for the specific learning disabilities program in the state of Georgia. I do not read my students as so different from the norm that they require specialized teaching strategies in order to learn but rather as students who for various reasons have felt the normalizing gaze of the State that culminated in their subjection as disabled.

How might students subjected as disabled/illiterate eclipse the conditions of their subjection in order to occupy different positions? To better understand how such a shift could be possible requires further discussion of subjection and how subjection allows for agency as conceived in poststructural theory.

Agency in Subjection

Earlier I discussed the reciprocal nature of subjection in poststructural theory, and how power both acts upon subjects and in turn allows subjects to gain the recognition of “getting it right.” The possibility of becoming successfully subjected and of occupying various subject positions simultaneously is what makes agency possible in poststructural theory. Agency is different in poststructural theory than it is in humanism because power

is theorized differently. In humanism, power is seen as belonging to individuals (one is powerful or not powerful). A person who has agency is one who “conceives of a line of action, knows how to achieve it and has the power and authority and right to execute it” (Davies, 1990, par. 9). In humanism the agentic individual often pits him or herself against other individuals or collectives.

In contrast, agency in poststructural theory is quite different. Power is located not in individuals but in networks and relationships between individuals. One is only a person to the extent that one recognizes and successfully takes up the discourses of particular collectives. An extreme example of this phenomenon is often seen in groups of adolescents. Teenagers who are unable or unwilling to take up the discourse of the “popular crowd” become invisible to that crowd and may be snubbed, bumped into, or spoken about as if they are not present. An agentic person, on the other hand, is one who is able to speak using the discourses of a particular group yet identifies him or herself as separate from the various groups in which he or she is a member. Individuals may have agency in one context yet have little in others.

The question is not then whether individuals can be said in any absolute sense to have or not to have agency, but whether or not there is awareness of the constitutive force of discursive practices and the means for resisting or changing unacceptable practices. (Davies, 1990, par. 138)

In poststructural theory, then, agency involves recognizing the conflicting discourses we are caught up in and choosing/changing those positions.

In this chapter, I am saying that the possibility of agency does exist in the self-contained SLD classroom; Colby, Jennifer, Michael, and Ramon are all agentic at various

times. Both they and I are sometimes able to recognize the constitutive force of the discourses of regular and special education and in some ways are able to change/resist those discourses. Recognizing how discourses constitute us often leads to tension. The special education discourse not only says that Colby, Jennifer, Michael and Ramon were not able to take up the position of successful students in the past but that by definition they will not ever be able to take it up – they have an “imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations” (Georgia Department of Education, 2000, p. 19).

The forms of resistance that we might take are complicated by the same factors that complicate the process of subjection. Although theoretically individuals are open to all subject positions, in reality this access is limited.

Social relations, which are always relations of power and powerlessness between different subject positions, will determine the range of forms of subjectivity immediately open to any individual on the basis of gender, race, class, age and cultural background. Where other positions exist but are exclusive to a particular class, race, or gender, the excluded individual will have to fight for access by transforming existing power relations.

(Weedon, 1997, p.91)

Rejecting the special education discourse in favor of the regular education discourse, that is, resisting a behaviorist, functionalist curricula in favor of a more constructivist one might be a first step in resisting our subjection as “abnormal” and privileging the second term of the regular/special binary. If we stopped there, however, we would still be operating in a binary. Poststructural work is about producing another

space. There are other problems inherent in a wholehearted adoption of the discourse of regular education, a primary one being that there is no one discourse of regular education. Most of the constructivist strategies used in the SLD classroom come out of a “good” regular education discourse, but this is problematic for the students because they are not aware of the “good” regular education discourse, only that I am teaching against the grain of the dominant discourse of the school, which is not constructivist.

While some regular education strategies may help those of us in special education to resist negative subject positions, we are never able to fully embrace the discourse of regular education because it positions us as abnormal, pathological. In this way the practices highlighted in the data are both and neither regular or special. All three practices could be said to be a part of both the good regular and special education discourses, but they go against the grain of the current logic and structure of schooling and serve as evidence of one more way in which we are “different.”

The category of “learning disabilities” is considered to be primarily an academic disability. Although such a disability can affect other areas such as behavior and socialization skills, by definition a learning disability exists in the areas of reading skills and/or comprehension, written expression, math calculation and/or reasoning, or listening and speaking as they are reflected in academic performance. Children with learning disabilities are generally regarded as “slow” rather than “retarded” or “bad/sad/mad.” Because of this, it is primarily in the academic areas that the students need to take up/be positioned differently, to take up/be positioned as “normal” and to be read as academically capable. Framed that way, the three themes become a part of how they are able to become agentic. Doing research, helping others, and being hard workers are what

students in my classroom have to do for me to read them as successfully subjected as good students. They appear to recognize this by the things they say and ways they behave. The curriculum, tasks and use of technology help make it possible for them to take up the position of good students. They are able to take up that position in part because the curriculum makes it available.

As a special education teacher immersed in the importance of curriculum, it is not surprising that I explored curriculum to see how it could be used to in a different way. The work of teachers, particularly special education teachers, is focussed on the way curriculum can be used to “normalise” students, remediate their deficits, and catch them up to the normal student. By using the curriculum to explore poststructuralist possibilities, I could perhaps read myself as doing no more than finding a different, more motivating way of doing special education teaching as usual. I would argue that I have done more than this by working to create new spaces for students to take up different subject positions, but I know that I can never really escape dominant discourses.

The data collected during this study present Colby, Jennifer, Michael and Ramon in a number of situations – in the classroom and computer lab interacting with each other and the teacher, in the more informal settings of parties, field trips, and other non-academic times, and in informal interview settings with their teacher and paraprofessional. These moments can be read as pieces of their lives in process, their multi-layered lives unfolding. This reading of lives-in-process is fundamental to poststructural theory: “Poststructural discourse entails a move from the self as a noun (and thus stable and relatively fixed) to the self as a verb, always in process, taking its

shape in and through the discursive possibilities through which selves are made” (Davies, 1997, p 275).

Once Colby, Jennifer, Michael and Ramon take up the position of good student, they must work at being read as students with agency. They are able to open up spaces in which they are able/literate, working the subject positions they occupy to their advantage, and move beyond all of our imaginings regarding what is possible. However, this does not come easily. The following vignettes, crafted from field notes, work samples, and videotape transcriptions, suggest specific narratives in which agency occurs.

April 2000: Working on the High School Project in the Classroom

Ms. Bowles circled by Michael and Jack on her ever-pacing circuit of the classroom, giving Jack the evil eye as he giggled and kicked Michael's chair. Ramon was working with his group to write their section of the project on the number of 9th graders passing Algebra. Colby and Jennifer were scouring their printouts to find the percentage of students who felt safe at school, and Mrs. Lee was getting the reluctant workers started. Satisfied that everyone was on task for the moment, Ms. Bowles moved in to help the students converting their outlines into paragraphs on the hodgepodge of computers in the back of the room.

"This right right here?" Michael asked, bringing Ms. Bowles' attention to his text. She read what he had written and nodded. "Yeah, and I would leave just highest. Go from the lowest to the highest, and then tell what's in the middle." She emphasized her point by moving her fist from her waist, up to her head, then down to shoulder level.

"Oh, we go from lowest to highest?" asked Mike, imitating Ms. Bowles' gestures. She nodded in response.

"We gotta do three of them, then we be finished?" asked Jack.

Ms. Bowles turned to Mike and laughed. "Somehow all the data in that chart needs to be in there," she said, pointing to the screen.

Jack sucked his teeth, turned his back, and put his head on his arm.

Ms. Bowles reread Michael's text and counted on her fingers, then stuck one out at the screen. "You've got to have Johnson there. Who's the highest?"

Mike turned to look at the wall chart. "Who's the highest...Johnson..."

Jack turned slightly to look at chart. His head was still on his arm, but he was peeking over it. "Groves!" he yelled.

"No!" said Mike.

"Yeah it is!" Jack asserted, and sat up.

Mike looked at his text. "Jenkins."

"Jenkins, that's the highest of kids who passed?" asked Ms. Bowles.

"Passed yeah," confirmed Mike.

"Uh uh, Groves!" said Jack.

"Thirty-eight!" yelled Mike, turning to Jack to make a hand gesture. He turned to look at the chart again. "Ain't no Groves!" Ms. Bowles and Jack turned to look at the chart. ""Groves have seventeen!"

"I can't see from here," said Ms. Bowles, putting her hand over her eyes to shield them from the light. "19, 17, 28, 20, 10, 38 – that one's 38."

"38 is Jenkins!" Mike exclaimed. He leaned over toward Jack and waved his hands beside his ears.

"That's the highest," nodded Ms. Bowles, turning to Jack.

"See, told you!" said Jack, laughing.

"All right!" Ms. Bowles said, walking away.

Mike waved his hand. "Calm down, dude!" he said to Jack.

"Told you!" repeated Jack.

"You done told me nothin!" disagreed Mike.

Jack pointed his finger in Mike's face. "Told you!"

Mike blocked Jack's finger. "You told your own self!" Jack slapped him in the stomach. Mike smiled, clapped his hands together, and started shaking them like he was congratulating himself.

In this story I read Michael as desiring to take up the subject position of good student and able to do so. Michael is recognized by me as successfully taking up the position of researcher and tutor. Although it is not explicit in this vignette, I do not read Jack as a successful student. However, there are several instances that point to my reading of Jack and reflect Michael's awareness of this reading (when Jack asks if they will be finished after doing "three of them" and I turn to Mike and laugh, and when Mike states that Jack told him nothing but had only "told your own self"). My pairing of Michael and Jack indicates that I not only read Mike as a successful student but one who has the potential to help Jack take up the subject position of good student as well. In this way Mike can be read as agentic as he opens up a space where he is able/literate and moves beyond my (lack of) imaginings to help Jack be subjected as a successful student.

This first vignette could be read as simply doing the "good educator" discourse in more interesting and challenging ways. Integration of the subject areas occurred as

students read statistical reports, discussed the mean, mode and median of various statistics, organized data into tables, and wrote compare/contrast paragraphs. The topic of high school related to student interests, built on their prior knowledge, and connected with debates going on in the community regarding high school exit exams. The task was scaffolded by me as students participated in discussions, webbed ideas, and edited their work and by technology as they outlined, drafted, and published their final report. The high school project in which students were engaged assumed that they would be able to discuss various components of the high school experience, compare the experiences of students related to which schools they attended, and move towards becoming more informed consumers regarding their own educational placements. It opened up the discourse of Advanced Placement courses, something the students had never heard of, and suggested that students with LD might be able to take such courses in their areas of strength.

Although this vignette (and the overall project it was a part of) does exemplify the “good educator” discourse, it also demonstrates how successfully taking up this discourse can lead to the possibility of agency for students labeled SLD. The dissemination of the final report, complete with students’ full names, disrupted the standard perception of special education students as disabled/illiterate. As they passed out the fliers to graduating eighth graders with the rest of the class, Michael and Jack seemed to take on a “normal” student category and could be read as academically capable. The work required to take up such a position is made visible in this vignette. Doing the dominant discourse well becomes one of many ways to help the students become agentic.

Poststructural theory focuses on the discursive positions available to Colby, Jennifer, Michael, and Ramon and how they work within and against them. Each of the four students are recognized by their teachers and each other as legitimately and successfully taking up the positions of technology expert and helper. The recognition of Colby, Jennifer, Michael and Ramon as contradicting the position of poor readers and writers (and therefore incompetent students) probably is facilitated by my perception/reading of them as successful students. An example of this can be seen in the second vignette that takes place in the computer lab.

May 2000: Access to Safe Water in the Computer Lab

The class entered the computer lab in a rush, each child running for the computer that was their favorite. "All right! Slow down! I'm glad you're so eager to work, but--"

As usual it seemed that Ms. Bowles was talking to herself. She really hoped that the Internet was up this afternoon, because she didn't have a plan B. Looking around the lab, it seemed that everyone knew what he or she was supposed to be doing. Today she was going to see how far they could get without any help.

Mike turned to Jennifer. "What we goin to?"

Jennifer showed Mike her paper with the web address she had copied down in the classroom. "This right here." She then moved it to her left and began typing it in the browser.

Mike opened Netscape on his computer. He leaned over to see where Jennifer was typing, then got his own paper with the web address. He put

it under his keyboard and began typing. Ms. Bowles walked by and stood between Mike and Ramon. "Where do we go to?" asked Ramon. Ms. Bowles showed him where to type the address in his browser, then walked away.

Ramon looked at Michael, who was still typing. "Michael!"

"What?"

Ramon looked at Michael's web address and started typing.

Making another trip around the lab, Ms. Bowles approached Jennifer and looked at her address. She leaned over Jennifer and helped her finish typing, one arm leaning on the counter to Jennifer's left, with the other over Jennifer's hand still on the mouse. She flipped her key chain behind her as it swung perilously close to Jennifer's head.

"Where you goin at?" asked Mike, typing and looking at Jennifer's address, periodically leaning over to get a better view.

Ms. Bowles finished typing Jennifer's address and moved off around the lab again. "You need to put 'water' in it," explained Jennifer. She looked over at Mike's web page. "E r," she explained, and leaned over to type on Mike's keyboard. Ramon leaned over almost in front of Michael's computer to look at the address.

"Put a dot right here?" asked Mike, pointing at Jen's screen.

"Unh-uh, you don't gotta put a dot."

"Press enter?"

"Yeah."

Leaning back into his own space, Michael almost bumped into Ramon, who was still looking at his monitor. "Unnnnnnh!" said Mike,

sticking his chest out in Ramon's face. He wiggled his head, showing off, and pressed the enter key. The web page popped up on the monitor. Michael made a fist, hit his palm, then spread his arms as if receiving cheers from a crowd. Then he leaned over to check out Ramon's monitor. Ramon was still typing in the address.

Ramon looked at his paper. He tapped Mike on the shoulder. "What's that say?" he asked.

Mike leaned over to see what Ramon was asking about. "You don't hafta copy that," he replied, leaning over to look at Ramon's screen. He shook his head and pointed at Ramon's paper.

"Oh, O.K.!" said Ramon.

Michael grabbed his paper, which was between the two boys. He pointed to Ramon's notebook, looked over at Jennifer's monitor and back at his own. Ramon finished typing the address and the page popped up.

Ms. Bowles had been watching Mike, Jenny and Ramon help each other get to the right web page. She noted with satisfaction that they had copied the address down right in the classroom, kept track of it on the way to the lab, realized that they needed it, and typed it into the browser without any errors. "Now we're getting somewhere!" she thought to herself.

In the second vignette, Jennifer, Michael, and Ramon work at their positioning as successful students, helpers, and technology experts. Mike asks Jennifer where to go on the Internet rather than me. Jennifer accepts the roles of technology expert and helper. At

the same time, she participates with me in the construction of herself as a successful student, accepting help and then modeling what I had just done with her with Mike. Mike then does the same for Ramon. I play a part in this construction by reading the students as able to help one another and walking away to work with another group. My recognition of Michael, Jennifer, and Ramon as simultaneously needing help and positioning them as being able to help makes the position of successful student available to them. Availability is not everything, however, as they must also work to maintain a category/position.

Once again it is possible to read this vignette as simply an example of the “good educator” discourse. I take up the position of teacher working to build independence in her students, so that they may acknowledge no limits in their quest to become knowledgeable, rational individuals aggressively exploring the World Wide Web for relevant information. In this way I seem to wish they would acquire/demonstrate the humanist form of agency by planning a line of action, knowing how to carry out their plan, and having what it takes to get the plan done – successfully. My curiosity about whether the students could get somewhere in the lesson without any help and thinking they were “getting somewhere” at the end seems to support this reading. This reading points to my recognition of the tensions between the discourses that we are caught up in and my humanist desire to move the students out of the margins and toward the center of the “regular” school experience. Part of the students’ willingness to take up the positions of good student, tutor, and technology expert may stem from similar desires. The students are subjected to the discourses surrounding the construction of successful student, tutor, and technology expert. What is of interest is how they actively take up these positions to their own advantage. My awareness of the dominant discourse’s emphasis on

independence becomes both humanist and poststructural as the students become more powerful and learn to use that power to extend the possibilities available to them.

An example of such an extension can be found in the third vignette of Ramon's use of Hyperstudio. In this vignette, Ramon is recognized by me as successfully taking up the position of technology expert and outlandish prankster. If I had not already read him in the past as a good student, I may have read the prankster position he takes up quite differently.

Spring 2000: Everyday Uses of Technology in the Classroom

"Ms. Bowles! Come quick! You gotta hear this!" yelled Ramon, grabbing Ms. Bowles by the arm and dragging her into the classroom.

"What in the world! Ramon! Let go of me!"

"We got it! We got it! You gotta hear it!" Ramon yelled, not turning her loose. "Come on!"

"Mrs. Lee, what is going on? What is he talking about?"

"I don't know," Mrs. Lee said, shaking her head. She pursed her lips.

"When I came in he was already back from exploratories, making all that racket!"

"OK, OK, what is this all about?" Ramon had deposited Ms. Bowles by the Macintosh.

"You know how Rasheen kept threatening me, and you said you couldn't do anything about it 'cause you didn't hear him? Well, we got him!"

"What do you mean? I still haven't heard - "

"Listen to this!" Ramon interrupted. "Wait. I gotta start up Hyperstudio."

By this time Ms. Bowles was intrigued. "What are you doing?" she laughed.

"Just wait. Now, see this button? Press this button!"

Ramon waited expectantly as Ms. Bowles pressed the button. A muffled sound came forth. "Wait! Wait!" Ramon grabbed the mouse from Ms. Bowles, quickly went to the control panels, selected the monitor/sound button, and turned up the volume. "Here, now do it."

Ms. Bowles pressed the button once again and leaned in close. "I'm gonna box you in the jaw!" came out of the computer speaker.

"What in the world!" she exclaimed. "What is that?"

"That's Rasheen!" Ramon yelled triumphantly. By this time the other students were returning from their exploratory classes and were clustered around the computer. Ramon pressed the button over and over. It was indeed Rasheen. "See! Now you have evidence. Now you have to write him up!"

The whole class laughed. Ms. Bowles shook her head with grudging admiration. "Well, I guess you're right. I bet the Hyperstudio people never thought someone would use their program like that!" she exclaimed.

"We're smart!" yelled Ramon. "We're SLD!"

Ramon seems to want to be read both as good student and as outlandish prankster. He wants to be recognized in the classroom. He calls out loudly when I'm working with

other groups, shows me the parts of the water web site he has been to before, and shows me what he is doing on his portable keyboard. He picks up phrases I use and integrates them into his performance as student, such as when he chastises others that they are not being sensitive to feedback.

My reading of Ramon as agentic is based on his takeup of the position of technology expert and his use of that position to open up possibilities for himself that move beyond what powerful others might have imagined. Because of his recognizability as a technology expert and good student, Ramon can afford to take up with a great deal of energy outlandish pranks that could be viewed as incongruous with conceptions of a good student. “Poststructuralism opens up the possibility of encompassing the apparently contradictory with ease – even, on occasion, with pleasure” (Davies, 1992, p. 59).

Ramon and I seem to get a great deal of pleasure from his reading of a potentially unpleasurable situation (being threatened) as an opportunity for an outlandish prank. He seems to read me as able to recognize this situation as such an opportunity and drags me into the room, a behavior I usually would not read as appropriate. He moved beyond my imagination not only of what he could do, but of what I could do in response to his being threatened.

This vignette also makes visible the work necessary to maintain the subject position of good student when the dominant discourses constantly work to position you as disabled/illiterate. Ramon appears to understand that he is both read by me as a “good student” and read by the dominant discourse as a “good *SLD* student,” that is, basically a good kid but dumb. His remark “I’m smart! I’m *SLD*!” seems to indicate his recognition of these conflicting discourses and his desire to choose/change positions.

Many things can lead to students recognizing the conflicting discourses they are caught up in and choosing/changing those positions. I wanted to make explicit the various discourses that I thought we were caught up in in the SLD self-contained classroom, but this proved a difficult task. Teacher-led lectures on the definitions of various disability categories, IQ ranges for the different programs, and slang terms for each disability left my white board looking like an introduction to an educational measures course and my students either nodding off or hurling the terms at each other as a new method of insulting one another. Charting the reading levels of the students in the class first led to speculation about whose score was the lowest, then to outrage and finally anger. Sending students to observe other classes, including those for the gifted, moderately intellectually disabled, overage, and emotionally disturbed led to more awareness of the discourses of the school but also to the students incorporating negative descriptors into their growing vocabularies. At times I felt that the students interpreted my desire to make a discourse explicit as an endorsement of that discourse, and when they stopped calling each other “retarded” and settled on “SLD,” I wasn’t sure that their becoming more aware of the special education discourse was necessarily positive.

Structuring these “discourse lessons” in forms that the students were more comfortable with changed the dynamic from a lecture that students were to listen to toward discussions that included their questions and opinions. In this way, the curriculum began to open up opportunities for students not only to take up the position of able/literate but also to choose other positions that went beyond my original imaginings. The following vignette provides an example of how we moved toward a more open discussion of the contradictory discourses surrounding us.

January 2001: Computers and Self-Advocacy

“Hurry up, you guys! You’re gonna run out of time!” urged Ms. Bowles. “You’ve got another two minutes, then we’re gonna do a whole group chart!”

The children got even more excited. Colby ran over to Steven and Carlos’s table, trying to see what they had written on their discussion web about learning with computers. “He’s cheating! He’s cheating!” yelled Carlos.

“He tried to look off of us too, man!” confirmed Jennifer.

“Get back there Colby, and help your group!” Ms. Bowles laughed. “One more minute!”

Colby ran back to his table. “What’s one more no for learning with computer?” asked Jamar.

“Ms. Bowles, why are we thinking of reasons not to use the computer if we want to get some?” asked Colby.

“Well, because that’s part of the discussion web, but think about it. Those might be things that people would use as arguments why we shouldn’t get them, so if you think of them first and come up with arguments against their arguments, you might win,” explained Ms. Bowles. The timer rang. “All right, everybody come back to your tables. Bring your charts. I’ll put one this one up here.” Ms. Bowles hung up a blank discussion web that was headed with the statement, “Learning with computers is better than learning without them.” On one side was written

“yes,” and on the other was “no.” “Group one, what’s one of your yesses?”

“I want to marry the computer because the computer has more education than me,” said Carlos. The whole class laughed.

“Sounds like you love the computer!” said Colby.

“O.K. let’s put the computer has information we need that can help us become educated,” rephrased Ms. Bowles.

“Yeah,” nodded Carlos.

“Group two?”

“Doing work on the computer is faster,” read Jennifer.

“Good. Using the computer is faster,” Ms. Bowles said as she added Jennifer’s statement to the group chart. “Group three?” No one said anything. “Table at the back? You’re group three.”

“Oh!” said Michael. “We can do work at our desks or Washington, D.C.” he read.

“Good. How ‘bout, we could use a laptop computer anywhere, like at our desks, outside, or on field trips?”

“Yeah!” said Colby. “That’s what we said!”

Ms. Bowles continued adding yes and no statements to the chart until each group’s ideas were represented. “Now,” she said to the class, “you’re going to write a letter saying why YOU need a computer. We don’t know who is going to read this letter, so we’re going to start it a special way. You’re going to write ‘To Whom it May Concern:’” She then wrote this on the board.

"I'm going to write to Mr. Roach!" said Jennifer.

"Well, we don't know if it will be him and Mr. Davenport, or someone downtown who will end up reading it. That's why we have to write it like this," Ms. Bowles explained, pointing to the board. "Now, you can look at any of the charts in the room to write your letter. Pick one of the ideas from the chart, or make up your own that isn't on there, and then go to town with it. If you say you want a laptop because it helps you write more neatly, explain why that's a problem. Go into a lot of detail. Go on and on!" Ms. Bowles was getting wound up now. "If you want a laptop, you need to convince them! Otherwise they might say, forget it! Then when you're done drafting, start typing it and I'll help you edit it right on the screen this time."

Some of the students started writing, while others looked confused. Jennifer got out her Alphasmart and started typing. Michael walked around the room, looking at the charts on the walls. "Come on now, we don't have much time!" prodded Ms. Bowles. Eventually everyone was engaged with the assignment. Ms. Bowles looked at her watch. It was almost time for lunch.

By the time this vignette took place (January 2001), the students have taken up the subject positions of good students, tutors, and technology experts with tremendous energy. At this moment, the entire class seems to be encompassing the apparently contradictory positions of good student/technology expert and SLD student with ease and

even pleasure. One reading of this vignette reveals the opportunities that open up when one is positioned as a good student. I read Colby's running around the classroom to "spy" on other groups as interest and engagement. The other students seem to read his behavior as resulting from their having written something worth reading or even appropriating as one's one and loudly shoo him away. I also read Colby's questioning of the assignment (and me) as appropriate and in my explanation of the task I make the discourse of administrator power more explicit (rational argument may persuade those in power to give you what you want/need).

Carlos' response is also deemed appropriate and does not conflict with my reading of him as successful student even though it is funny and other students laugh. Had I not already read Carlos as successful student, I might have read his comment as inappropriate and disruptive. Reading him as successful student and technology expert opens up the opportunity for me to take pleasure in his joke rather than become upset about misbehavior. It also opens up the opportunity to clarify what turned out to be a reason Carlos enjoys learning with computers.

In a more traditional reading there is some irony in asking students who are disabled/illiterate to write letters explaining why they need laptop computers. Students who need computers because they read and write significantly below grade level are seemingly anomalous with students who are able to determine and express their needs and demonstrate that they understand their intended audience. The students appear contradictory because they are constituted through contradictory discourses. They are both able/literate and disabled/illiterate at the same time.

The students appear to be beginning to understand that recognizing the contradictory discourses they are caught up in can result in resisting or changing unacceptable practices. I read the procedure for accessing assistive technology as unacceptable. My bringing the discussion of learning with technology to the students and assigning them the task of writing a letter stating why they need such technology makes this reading visible. The students in turn make the dominant readings of students labeled SLD explicit in their letters and work to resist such readings.

The text of the students' letters provides an example of what is possible when they begin to move beyond all of our imaginings. Colby envisions a classroom where paper is not necessary; "If you ran out of paper you could use the laptop. You could type on in and save it on your disk." He seems to recognize the tasks that the dominant discourse deems important – "I could play math games to help me memorize my math times tables" – but also imagines a more constructivist curriculum when he writes, "I could make movies and take pictures and put them on the computer and print them out. It could be for a project or something." He also recognizes it is his positioning as SLD that makes getting a laptop possible. "I could put a disk in it and it would read to me."

While Colby does not appear to see anything anomalous in his dual positioning of technology expert and student labeled SLD, Jennifer seems to recognize this contradiction as a possible barrier. She challenges such a reading, writing "you think we don't need it because you think we're mentally challenged kids but we're not because we can do this and that, like webs, spelling, social studies, and math."

Michael sees getting a laptop as potentially opening up many environments for learning. "If we had a laptop computer we could sit in our own desks....when we have

like math for homework we could do it on the computer and when we get back to school we could tell Ms. Bowles we did our math on the computer.” Like Jennifer, Mike seems to anticipate that administrators may see him as not able, in this case, not able to take care of a laptop. He imagines, “I could take my computer everywhere so it wouldn’t get stolen. I could put it in my backpack and nobody would steal it. I would take care of it.” In their writing, the students both recognized and went beyond my imaginings for them should they be provided with laptop computers.

And so...

Poststructural theorizing of four vignettes demonstrates my reading of Colby, Jennifer, Michael, and Ramon as agentic. Such a reading opens up opportunities for students not only to develop literacy skills but also to better understand their positionings by contradictory discourses. These opportunities become especially important as I look at times when students are not agentic, when they are unable to eclipse their positioning by the dominant discourse as illiterate/disabled. An examination of such times serves to underscore the importance of moments in which we all seem to find pleasure in getting it right.

In concluding this chapter, I look back over the four vignettes I chose to share, and worry that they are not very exciting. When I began thinking of how I was applying poststructural theory to my practice, I worried then too. Theories filled with exotic imagery such as nomads, warriors, cyborgs, and dancing, laughing mothers and the like left me wondering exactly what type of teacher I was supposed to be. I wasn’t sure how taking up poststructural discourse would help me disrupt the status quo and open up moments in which my students could go beyond their subjection. In my case, this

disruption came from adopting a different paradigm, a paradigm of a constructivist rather than functionalist curriculum. I struggled with the idea that what I was doing wasn't blatantly transformational, so how could it be poststructural? The stories I have told here are not exotic, but rather deceptively ordinary. I gradually came to understand that poststructuralism is not about transformation, but rather troubling what is often seen as ordinary. The surface of the stories point not to abnormality or deviance but simply to students who sound pretty much like students anywhere. Fine and Weis (1996) struggle with similar issues, and caution researchers to attend to *all* of our data, not just the exotic:

When we (researchers) listen to and read narratives, we tend (with embarrassment) to be drawn to – in fact, to code for – the exotic, the bizarre, the violent. As we reflect, though, we nevertheless feel obligated to explore meticulously the very tedious sections of the transcripts: those sections not very sexy, exciting, or eroticizing, like when the informants walk their kids to school, read the newspaper in horror, turn on the television for a break, look for a doctor they can trust, hope their children are safe on the way home from school. These rituals of daily living – obviously made much more difficult in the presence of poverty and discrimination, but mundane nonetheless – are typically left out of ethnographic descriptions of life in poverty. They don't make very good reading, and yet are the stuff of daily life. We recognize how carefully we need to not construct life narratives spiked only with the hot spots.

This chapter has illustrated the “daily rituals” of the classroom, made more difficult in the presence of disabilities, but mundane nonetheless. Chapter Six, Dancing

The Spiral Dance: Stories Of Subjectification, rounds out the picture and shows how, in spite of often heroic efforts, the students are not always able to eclipse their subjection as illiterate/disabled. Such stories, it seems, often tend to represent more of the “hot spots” than the mundane.

CHAPTER 6

DANCING THE SPIRAL DANCE: STORIES OF SUBJECTIFICATION

Me: You ever wished you never had any stroke?

Jen: I wish I didn't! When it happened was when I had that mosquito bite. I had to go to the hospital eighty times! I was about to die!

Me: I guess it's better –

Colby: I almost died.

Me: -I guess it's better than bein' dead.

Colby: I was swimmin' in the pool, just swimmin' around, I was about to get out of the pool 'n I had a seizure. The only thing – the only thing that knew what to do was Thomas' mom. I was, they'd all gone home. You know, I woulda died.

Mike: When I was about, five, or four, or somethin', I wasn't talkin'. I ain't never talked and then, I then, I ain't never tied my shoes. So.

Me: Could you understand what people said to you, you just couldn't say anything back?

Mike: No, I couldn't say nothin' back. I couldn't move, I couldn't move my mouth and stuff...I could move my mouth but I couldn't talk real loud like that, stuff.

Me: You still get like that when you're upset don't you? It's like the words won't come out?

Mike: Yeah. My elementary teacher like, I might get mad or somethin' and get in trouble or somethin', he was tryin' to put, he was tryin' to put me down, so I get mad, I get on the bus, I be mad and stuff. They had, uh, tie, they had tied me to a seat.

Me: Did you ever get loose?

Mike. No. I couldn't get loose. I try, I try to get loose out, but I couldn't.

- Member Check, December 2000

Introduction

This poststructural ethnography uses rhizoanalysis to deconstruct the literacy practices of four students in a self-contained classroom for students with learning disabilities (LD's). Chapter Five focuses on the four focal informants' ability to successfully take up the subject position of good student as well as how the takeup of poststructural discourse disrupted schooling as usual and opened up moments in which the students could go beyond the conditions of their subjection as disabled/illiterate. To suggest that such moments reflect the entire experience of being taught in a self-contained LD class, however, would be a gross misrepresentation. Many factors and structures function to hold students in the margins and limit the positions available to them. This chapter will illustrate times when the students are not agentic/powerful along with the resources agency requires that were not available at those times. The ways in which power relations are constituted and maintained are examined, along with the rationalities that make relations of power seem reasonable, even inevitable. Various texts are used to explore what makes an eclipse of their positioning by the dominant discourse as illiterate/disabled at times impossible.

Influences

This chapter was created to portray the experiences of Colby, Jennifer, Michael, and Ramon as they became more able to see the contradictory discourses acting through and on them as well as their inability at times to resist particular forms of subjectification. A number of texts, including data stories, data poems, and song lyrics are juxtaposed and linked by discussion, creating a text that weaves together experience, theory, and popular

culture. The creation of this chapter has been influenced by the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987), Donna Alvermann (2000b), and Suzanne Damarin (1994).

The title of this chapter, *Dancing the Spiral Dance*, was taken from the article “Would You Rather Be a Cyborg or a Goddess? On Being a Teacher in a Postmodern Century” by Susan Damarin (1994). I have discussed this article in terms of the figurations it provides in Chapter Two, but I would like to focus here on the image of the spiral that has become important to this analysis. Earlier I explained that my first conception of deconstructing literacy practices involved the reversal of the terms of a binary, particularly able/disabled and literate/illiterate. Over time, however, I came to understand lines of flight not in terms of an arc but rather a spiral, a simultaneous both/neither that in this study we seemed to pass by on our attempts to see things differently. No matter how hard we tried to go beyond the conditions of our subjection by the dominant discourses of schooling as usual, the same issues always seemed to pop up on what felt like trips along the same old circular path. I seized upon the idea of the spiral dance as a way to get up and out of such a path. Damarin (1994) explains as follows:

The spiral might have been a circle, were it not for the hot air of the discourse of technological progress always blowing, pushing the circular arcs up and away in an extra dimension. The spiral is held in to its center by a centripetal force....none of us [are] faithful to the center; the centrifugal forces that send us packing off in all directions might be as innocent as curiosity or as densely coded as the serpent in the garden. Pushed and pulled – in, out, and up, - *we cannot not dance*. (p. 60)

Dominant discourses became so much hot air that worked to push my thinking up and away into another dimension while still holding us tightly to the center. It became my goal to find the centrifugal forces that might send us off in different directions as we always already danced the dance, stepping to and around the dominant discourses.

In Chapter Three I discuss the figuration of the rhizome and how it “ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles. A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 7). The figuration of the spiral with its centrifugal forces that flings things off into all directions and that of the rhizome, with its ruptures and proliferations, clicked together for me as in some way similar despite their structural differences.

Although such theoretical constructs were important, it was the work of Donna Alvermann (Alvermann, 2000b) that helped bring figurations like the spiral and the rhizome to my analysis of classroom experiences. In her article “Researching Libraries, Literacies and Lives: A Rhizoanalysis,” Alvermann (2000b) describes ways in which she used Deleuze and Guattari’s figuration of the rhizome that enabled her to “think differently about the social networks in which the adolescents in the Read and Talk Clubs were anchored” (p. 119). In Chapter Three, I discussed how Alvermann (2000b) juxtaposes various pieces of data in order to look at both data and her participants’ lives in new ways. The first step of the rhizoanalysis involved making maps that linked findings from a previous study with different examples of popular culture that had come to her attention in the course of a new study. Frustrated by the hierarchization of the data

that resulted, Alvermann returns to the original texts and rereads them, this time attending to the attachments and emotions they evoke. She then selects five pieces of data and juxtaposes them specifically to see what they do to each other and her textual others, as well as how they connect to her personally. Looking to the description of the rhizome characterized as “cartographic” by Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987), she calls the result of the new reading the *tracing* and her original study the *map*, she then *puts the tracing back on the map* in order to find silences or themes that had been omitted in the original analysis.

Using Alvermann’s description of her methods as a guide, I used four texts to ask what each does to the other, what they do to the focal informants, and how they connected to me personally. I then used poststructural theory to guide my interpretation as I put the “tracings” of my journey “back on the map.”

The texts that I selected/created to work with in this chapter can be read as negative, depressing, humiliating examples of the discourses that subject students taught in self-contained classes. One of my peer reviewers shared that she would be too embarrassed to share one of the incidents if it had happened in her classroom. I struggled not only with how to represent and analyze such experiences but to recognize and deal with them as they occurred. While poststructural theory helped me to better understand how disciplinary power functions to make such experiences possible, I doubted that such an understanding alone would help my students understand the conflicting discourses subjecting them and simply choose one they liked better. “Whereas, in principle, the individual is open to all forms of subjectivity, in reality individual access to subjectivity is governed by historically specific social factors and the forms of power at work in a

particular society” (Weedon, 1997, p. 91). Tensions between principle and reality shaped my analysis as well as my classroom practice. Part of putting the tracings back on the map involved not just the production of this product, a chapter that became part of the dissertation, but changes in my practice as well. These changes will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

Five texts were used in this analysis: a data story written from a transcription of video data collected in May 2000, song lyrics written by hip hop rapper Eminem, a data story based on an entry in my field notes written in October 2000, excerpts from a transcript of a focus group interview of Colby, Jennifer, and Michael in December of 2000, and a data poem crafted from that same interview. The five texts are presented in the order in which they were collected/created/occurred and are linked together by my rememories and rereadings of the texts and why they were selected. This is followed by a more formal analysis guided by poststructural theory and an explanation of how such an analysis has the potential to change classroom practice.

Rhizoanalysis: Data Tracings

I remember the last day of the 1999-2000 school year, a day that the kids had nothing to do, no assignments, no schoolwork. The board still showed remnants of our discussion of ebonics from the previous day, the list of food to be brought to the end-of-the-year party, and the number of days left of school and underneath where someone had written, "I am happy." The room was in disarray, the contents of closets and desks strewn about, a group playing a Playstation in one corner, another with the Nintendo 64 hooked up to the Channel 1 TV suspended from the ceiling in the other. It was a twenty-first century orgy of technology: video games, kids playing computers, listening to Walkmen

and boom boxes, someone continually videotaping the activity. Students grouped, played, shifted, and grouped again with no adult interference. Somehow turns were taken and everyone got a chance to do everything. The noise was appalling. Smackdown wrestlers grunted, motorcycles and cars crashed, kids called out for "downs," and the rapping of Eminem grew louder and louder. Mrs. Lee tried to get someone to explain who was doing what on the screen. I was trying to fill out a form listing all the students' pre and post test scores for special ed that had been due the week before. A constant stream of people came in and out. The teacher for the visually impaired came and went, dancing to the music. Curious students peeked in the windows. The principal and resource officer conducted a drugs and weapon search. This was a day where the kids were in charge, where as long as no one came to anyone's attention, they could do what they wanted. It was a time when what was usually hidden was brought out into the open, or at least recorded onto videotape.

My memories of the last day of school stuck with me through the summer, and would not let me rest. Ideas brewed, themes stewed, guided my reading, forced me to buy CD's that I didn't approve of. What started it all off was letting them use the video camera...

Rasheen grabbed the camera and chased Dominic around the room, calling him by name. Of all the students in the self-contained class, Rasheen and Dominic had long held the honor of the most stigmatized. On one occasion when a girl came in with a sheet to be signed by every teacher, Rasheen and Dominic had both immediately dived under their desks and hidden their faces under hoods and sweatshirts. Now, several months later

and cornered by Rasheen and the video camera, Dominic attempted to explain, “I’m helpin this SLD class-”

“Oooh, no,” disagreed Rasheen, “you special ed! We helpin you!”

“I’m helpin Rasheen, Michael-”

“Rasheen’s not in this class!” protested Rasheen from behind the lens.

Dominic continued his list of class members. “Ramon...”

“Yeah, man, he helping people, you know,” concurred Ramon as the video camera swung to include him.

“Yeah, I gotta help the slow kids, the slow learners,” explained Rasheen.

Turning the tables, Dominic yelled, “Yeah, he’s slow, he’s SLD!”

Rasheen ran off, zooming in on another group across the room. “Antoine Smith.” He pushed the record button off, then on again as Antoine ducked behind Jack. “Slow class. Jack in the slow class.”

“Man! Go on with that jive now!” Antoine complained. Rasheen turned, found Dominic once more through the viewfinder, and zoomed in on him until his face filled the frame. “SLD!” Rasheen called out, then turned the camera on himself. His face, all blurry, filled the frame. “Slow learnin disability, man!” Colby, standing nearby, crossed his eyes. Rasheen looked over and saw him. “Gotta get that!” he yelled, turning the camera around to capture Colby. “Slow learnin disability. Do that eye thing!” he prodded excitedly.

Ramon came over and asked, “what you doin with the SLD camera?”

Rasheen pointed the camera at Ramon and tried to look innocent. “Oh, I ain’t – I ain’t got it on play so – I ain’t got it on record - ”

Ramon grabbed the camera away from Rasheen and looked through the viewfinder. "It says record, man, in the right hand corner!"

Rasheen ran to the reading center and tried to hide under a beanbag chair. Antoine went over, lay on him, grabbed him between the legs and pressed him down on the ground, exposing his face to the camera. After Ramon captured the wrestling match, Antoine got up and grabbed the camera. Both boys looked at Rasheen hiding under the beanbag chair, the corner of his orange shorts and one foot hanging out. Antoine began to film. "SLD kids always do that kind of stuff. That's Rah-sheen, man, that's SLD right there. That's S - L - D -," narrated Ramon.

"Hold up!" commanded Antoine.

Sensing a pause in the filming, Rasheen peeked out from under the beanbag. "Stop it!" he protested.

Seeing that Antoine was ready, Ramon resumed his narration. "We are just people, here tryin to discover - "

"SLD culture," finished Antoine.

"SLD. That's SLD," began Ramon.

"Aren't you in SLD, Rasheen? Rasheen!" prodded Antoine.

Mrs. Lee looked across the room and saw Ramon and Antoine standing over Rasheen in the reading center. She walked over to find out what was going on. "He's trying to photograph you. Stop - "

Rasheen peeked out from under the beanbag. "SLD Antoine Smith!" he yelled quickly, then hid his head once more.

“It’s for Ms. Bowles!” Mrs. Lee explained to Rasheen in an exasperated tone, not realizing how the boys were using the camera. “It’s not like it’s going to be on public TV!”

“It might do!” Rasheen said, his voice muffled. Ramon and Antoine ran off, looking for something else to film.

Some time later, Rasheen once again got his hands on the video camera. He panned aimlessly around the room, stopping to focus several times on different children, but no one paid any attention to him. He stopped on Michael, zooming in. “Michael he’s in SLD – he’s been here for ten years. Nah, he been here for his whole life!” Michael looked up, then went back to playing his video game. Rasheen moved on to Ramon, who immediately noticed he was being filmed. “Don’t you dare! I’m just in here helpin photograph stuff!” Ramon protested. Before he had a chance to say anything else, someone knocked on the door. Rasheen ran over to open it and captured Ned as he walked in.

“Hey Ned,” called Antoine.

“SLD!” Rasheen said as Ned looked toward the camera.

“I’m SLD Ms. Bowles!” Ned agreed, grinning, then walked over to the group of boys gathered around the CD player.

“Slow learnin dummy!” crowed Rasheen, tracking Ned as he walked. “Ned! His name is Ned, I know him as that. He’s in SLD. He play football. Antoine Smith. He SLD.”

“No, no, no, son,” Antoine said.

Chasing after Ned, Rasheen said, “SLD. Tell her you SLD!”

Antoine turned to watch. “Will the real Slim Shady please stand up!”

Craig turned gracefully toward Rasheen, still holding the camera. “SLD, baby! For life! SLD!”

“SLD for life?” questioned Rasheen. He sounded doubtful and somewhat incredulous that Ned would make such a statement on camera.

“Yeah, baby!”

“Special ed. Stupid learnin dummy, that’s what it spells,” said Rasheen.

“Yeah!” laughed Craig, and turned back toward the CD player. Rasheen wandered away, looking for someone else to catch on tape.

Remembering that day now, almost a year later, makes me remember other things as well, like how the Eminem song “The Real Slim Shady” stuck in my mind for days afterwards. It was so popular at the time that references to it seemed to turn up everywhere I went, from newspaper articles to an IEP meeting I attended at a private school. Finally, I gave in to my desire to hear the album my students had played continuously on the last day of school one more time and went, not to Wal Mart as Ramon’s mother had done, but to Best Buy to purchase the uncensored version. In the privacy of my car it was easy to imagine myself as just one of the kids, listening to the naughty, angry and wickedly funny lyrics and singing along. I knew in the back of my mind that there was something important in Antoine’s comment “will the real SLD stand up” echoed later by Ramon as the students waited for their buses to be called. It got a little clearer as I listened to the song over and over again.

**In every single person there's a slim shady lurkin
 He could be workin at burger king, spittin on your onion rings
 Or in the parking lot, circling, screamin I don't give a fuck
 With his windows down and his system up
 So will the real shady please stand up
 And put one of those fingers on each hand up
 And be proud to be outta your mind and outta control
 And one more time, loud as you can, how does it go?**

**I'm Slim Shady, yes, I'm the real Shady
 All you other Slim Shady's are just imitating
 So won't the real Slim Shady please stand up, please stand up, please stand
 up**

Haha guess it's a Slim Shady in all of us...fuck it let's all stand up

The summer went by, I played around with what I called my “slim shady” analysis, and my stepson confided that he found my fondness of Eminem somewhat shocking in light of the homophobic and misogynistic lyrics he wrote. I kept my feelings of being one of the gang to myself. I wondered what my students would think of my comparison of an LD kid to Slim Shady. Would they agree that there's a Slim Shady in everyone, waiting to disrupt the dominant discourses by screaming, “I don't give a fuck?” As the school year began, however, I soon was distracted from such thoughts by other, equally disturbing occurrences.

It was early one fall morning as I headed toward Mr. Raklas' room. It still amazed me that he was willing to teach my kids science once a week during his planning time. Although I had volunteered to have some of the other special ed teachers use my computers with their kids once a week, no one had taken me up on it yet. I wondered if I would be as willing to teach their kids as Mr. Raklas had been to teach mine.

“Hey Mr. Raklas!” I called out as I walked into his classroom. Science equipment was scattered everywhere in untidy stacks that somehow seemed to go with Mr. Raklas’ tousled hair and grim expression. “What’s up? You don’t look so hot,” I prodded, flopping onto a science table near his desk.

“Ah, I don’t know. Next year I think I want to be you.”

“What? What do you mean?”

“Teach special ed. You’re so good at what you do. I just nominated you for teacher of the year.”

“No kidding. That’s pretty funny seeing as how I just nominated you!”

“I’m just not enjoying what I’m doing. I thought teaching older kids would be better. When I taught elementary kids it was like everything just went over their heads,” he said sadly, moving his hand over his head in the familiar gesture teachers used when talking about kids not understanding things. “I just bought a house, so I need to work for a few more years, I don’t know...”

I thought about how I had despaired when I first started teaching in the SLD self-contained class. “Come on, give it a chance, you’ve only been here a few months. I didn’t think I’d ever figure out how to teach that class-”

“They’re so interested, so eager to learn, and you really seem to enjoy what you do with them. My kids are just interested in sex and misbehaving.”

I had been following along, nodding my head and envisioning my children working with Mr. Raklas, collecting fish and shrimp in the creek behind the school, doing cabbage chemistry, and testing various helicopter designs.

“I like working with your kids because they’re slow,” he concluded.

I stopped mid nod. “They’re not slow!” I protested. “They just can’t read well!”

“Well, they’re so interested,” he tried to explain. “They’re not social.”

“Yes they are!” By this time I was almost shouting. If only he knew how social they could be, I thought.

“Well, not the same way as the eighth graders,” he continued.

“They may be immature, but they’re social!” Something suddenly dawned on me. “So that’s why you don’t want to do inclusion with us?”

“My kids are so bad, they’re too cool to get into anything, they don’t think learning is cool to do at all. I’m afraid they’d rub off on your kids.”

“Well, you never know. My kids might rub off on yours!”

“Well, I’ll think about it,” he hedged. “I don’t know if I’ll even be here after Christmas. But I’ll be down in your room today, 8:30, right?”

“Yeah,” I said, heading out the door. I was still troubled by what he had said, and understood even less why he volunteered in my classroom than I had on the way in.

Traveling back in my mind to the fall made me think of another conversation I had, a conversation with the children. I can’t remember the context of the conversation,

but I do remember that we had somehow gotten onto the topic of favorite music.

Someone mentioned Eminem. Thinking of my stepson’s response to my liking him, I nonchalantly dropped, “yeah, I have that CD,” into the discussion. Talk stopped as the kids looked at each other quickly, then kept talking as if I hadn’t said anything.

Dominique looked at me, taking a chance. “You got that CD?” he asked, not quite believing. “Yeah, not the WalMart version either!” I answered back in what I imagined as

my cool, hip tone. Dominique, Colby, and Michael looked at one another, laughing. “I am, whatever you say I am” started Mike. “If I wasn’t then why would I say I am!” responded Dominique. We all laughed together, then went on with the conversation as if nothing had happened.

**‘Cause I am, whatever you say I am.
If I wasn’t, then why would I say I am?
In the paper, the news, everyday I am.
I don’t know it’s just the way I am.**

**They always keep askin the same fuckin questions
What school did I go to?
What hood I grew up in?
The why, the who what, when the where and the how
‘til I’m grabbin my hair and I’m tearin it out**

**‘Cause I am, whatever you say I am.
If I wasn’t, then why would I say I am?
In the paper, the news, everyday I am.
I don’t know it’s just the way I am.**

I am whatever you say I am – it reminded me so much of the students’ protests when they complained the curriculum was “krazy” and too hard. That “aw shucks, we’re special so don’t tax us” mentality I tried to fight against. Did our laughing at it mean we understood it as just a big joke? A spoof on the idiocy of establishment adults? It seemed we were always laughing at matters that most would take serious, like the time I got Colby, Jennifer and Michael together to share my slim shady analysis and ask them what being labeled LD meant to them, to their lives. The sound of raucous laughter and squeals on the interview tape concealed the more serious tone of the words themselves.

Everybody think that we stupid
 Think we
 Think we
 That we go at the wheelchair people class
 The wheelchair people
 And make fun of us and stuff
 If somebody say we in the slow class
 Just tell 'em you're smart
Y'all smart? If we dumb where y'all be?
 Then I'm like
 I shouldn't a said that
 When I'm sitting in my homeroom
 And they point
 SLD
 That bothers me
 I don't think about it if somebody say that
 I be like bunk that
 Forget about that
 Cause that –
 That's not even true
 We not slow
 It's just our minds
 We just forget stuff
 They not right
 They
 They try to
 Make us feel down
 Make us sad
 Make us angry and stuff
 They think they smart
 That we dumb and they smart
 That's why I think they be saying that
 They think they smart and we're dumb and stupid
 Retarded
 I don't mind if I'm SLD or not
 Doesn't really bother me
 Doesn't matter to me
That much

Putting the Tracing Back on the Map

In looking to Alvermann for an example of how to “do” a rhizoanalysis, I found
 the quote “There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think

differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking at all” (Foucault, cited in Alvermann, 2000b, p. 123). The data included in this chapter were incredibly painful for me to look at as I realized my complicity with the dominant discourse of schooling as usual. Like Alvermann, using rhizoanalysis to think differently about pieces of data I collected during this study has helped me make new connections, connections I was unaware of until writing these sentences. Looking at the data now I note that there is little in this chapter that directly relates to literacy practices or children taking up the subject position of good student. My further analysis of the data looks at discourses outside the classroom and how those discourses shape the practices within while at the same time make it difficult, if not almost impossible, for students to go beyond the conditions of their subjection as not “normal.” In doing so, I once again use poststructural theory, particularly the work of Foucault, Deleuze, and Davies, to put the tracings back on the map.

Power, Knowledge, and Agency Continued

There are several shifts in thinking required to understand Foucault’s conception of power. Some of these were discussed in Chapter Two and will be repeated below, while others will be discussed for the first time here. Most importantly, power must be understood as being in motion and never fixed in relation to knowledge or subjectivity. Power can be a positive force, one that not only “says no but traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse” (Foucault, 1980, p. 119). Struggles against power are not themselves without power. Unlike critical and Marxist conceptions of power in which one group is subjugated by another, in poststructural theory

Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (Foucault, 1980, p. 98)

Foucault sees knowledge and power as inextricably linked. Power is strong because it produces effects at the level of desire and the level of knowledge. To understand how power relations are put and held in place we need to examine not violence, but the forms of knowledge, or "rationalities" that make particular forms of power possible. The relation between knowledge and power is that relations of power presuppose knowledge and simultaneously makes individuals desire that knowledge. The lines of force do not themselves see and speak, but rather make us to see and speak. Deleuze (1988) explains how the effects of power work:

No doubt power, if we consider it in the abstract, neither sees nor speaks.

It is a mole that only knows its way round its network of tunnels, its multiple hole: it "acts on the basis of innumerable points"; it "comes from below". But precisely because it does not itself speak and see, it makes us see and speak. (p.82)

Bringing Foucault and Deleuze together seems particularly relevant to this, a rhizoanalysis of practices, agency, and resistance. Power is a rhizome that fractures and travels a network of tunnels, working the spaces created by rupturing lines of force. In the following sections I will work from the ground, out of the middles, stepping carefully over lines of breakage, lines of descent, to extract various meanings of power and knowledge from narratives carefully crafted and situated in the intersections of disparate discourses.

Agency and Subjection: Part Two

Chapter Five demonstrates my reading of Colby, Jennifer, Michael, and Ramon as agentic and provides narrative examples of such agency. In the data analyzed in this chapter, opportunities for agency were limited by many factors. One such factor was the limited resources available to students outside of the SLD classroom. In a study of the possibilities of agency in the practices of an Australian classroom, Davies (1990) found that several types of resources were necessary for the possibility of agency, including discursive resources, personal resources, and social resources. These resources are discussed below.

Discursive resources involve how individuals are defined. To be agentic, the individual must be constructed discursively as existing not only as a member of one of more collectives but also in some way independent of those collectives. The individual must also be defined as one who actively makes sense of the meanings available in the discourses used rather than passively receiving those meanings (and can therefore take up or refuse those discourses and the positions available within those discourses). Finally, individuals must have access to

recognized and recognizable discourse practices that provide a range of positions so that the position one is currently in does not feel inevitable.

The second type of resources necessary for agency to be possible are personal resources. Personal resources include access to ways to bring about alternative positionings, including knowledge, skills, the ability to use relevant discourses, and the desire to be agentic. To have agency, an individual has to be able to see oneself as one who can and should have agency, make relevant choices, carry them through, and take responsibility for them.

The third type of resources are social resources. Agency requires access to other people who will accept the positioning of oneself as agentic. Social resources are similar to personal resources in that they involve being able to take up and mobilize relevant discourses, but the focus is on access to interactive others. Just having access to the discourse practices is not enough – an individual must be seen by others as legitimate in taking up those discourses.

There are many barriers to agency for students labeled SLD. In the sections below, I will look at how discursive, personal, and social resources are limited by the rationalities that make a lack of agency seem rational and inevitable. These rationalities come from various discourses of schooling-as-usual and emerged from the rhizoanalysis of the data provided above.

Positioned as Lacking Discursive Resources

Colby, Jennifer, Michael and Ramon exist in terms of few collectives, really only in terms of one: that of the collective of dis-abled. In the context of the school, they do not exist independent of that collective. They have not achieved the position of good

subject in the eyes of their peers and other teachers they come in contact with, and as Butler (1997) suggests, there is no such thing as a bad subject.

The students videotaping each other on the last day of school have two external active lines of force running through them. They are not independent of those lines of force and cannot be indifferent or impervious to them. One line of force, taken up and spoken into existence by the students and teachers outside of the LD classroom, both presupposes and actualizes the knowledge that students in such classrooms have limited intellectual capacity – are “slow learning dummies” and are seen as other than normal. This is also exemplified by the data poem. Those outside the classroom want to remain “normal” and for this to be established and maintained, someone must be positioned as other than normal. The other line of force, taken up and spoken into existence by the SLD teacher, is that differential diagnosis is objective and useful; that is, knowing you are “SLD” and not “ID” (retarded) or “EBD” (mad/bad/sad) is not only helpful, but preferable. The students walk in a space between these lines of force that, while contradictory, both limit the collective that the students “belong” to and refuse to imagine their existence outside of that collective.

Being limited to one collective also limits the students’ access to discursive practices and makes a range of alternative ways of seeing and being almost impossible. Such limits make it all too easy to experience the positionings the students find themselves in as inevitable. The rationalities that give sense to the narratives found in the rhizoanalysis are, from the point of view of the “good special educator” discourse, that student disability is a pathological, and therefore lifelong, condition, and individuals should strive to be rational and coherent beings. From the schooling-as-usual point of

view, people with disabilities are all alike (“stupid”) and being labeled SLD is stigmatizing for those so labeled.

The students seem to experience their positioning of SLD as inevitable, which is not surprising given the power of the rationalities that support this view. While different meanings of the term SLD are provided, there seems to be no escape from the label and the subsequent normalizing function that it performs. In this way, the impossibility of ever being read as a normal, good student in school seems inevitable. My attitude was that students should take their placement in a special class and any teasing or self-consciousness that came with such placement “rationally.” By encouraging them to keep a stiff upper lip, take it like a man, in silence, I also seemed to assume that being teased, feeling self-conscious, or being uncomfortable with such a positioning was also inevitable.

The literature on students labeled SLD does not support a definition of the individual as students who can actively make sense of the discourses used by and about the groups in which they are members. Students with LD are described as deficit in metacognitive, self-help, reasoning, and interpersonal skills. Few people who were not trained in the discourse of special education would be able to make sense of that discourse. My own efforts to explain those discourses to the students seemed to lead not to understanding but feelings of anger, sadness, and the inevitability of such a positioning.

Positioned as Lacking Personal Resources

While Colby, Jennifer, Michael and Ramon each seem to have a desire to be agentic, they have little sense of themselves as people who both can and should position

themselves in that way. In her homeroom, Jennifer makes the choice to position herself as smart but is unable to carry her decision through. Later she tells a classmate who has called her smart, “If I was smart I wouldn’t be in this class.”

As a group, adolescents are not seen in our society as having the ability to be agentic. They are positioned as unable to make relevant, rational choices or take responsibility for those choices. Adolescents in America are positioned as egocentric, irrational, a danger to themselves and others, desperate for material goods and obsessed with food, sex, and other forms of immediate gratification. Teachers often bemoan the downward spiral of student behavior resulting in kids who don’t care about learning and don’t respect themselves, each other, their families, or their teachers. This rationality is hinted at in the story of Mr. Raklas who finds his adolescent students more difficult to teach than elementary students and is depressed by their seeming lack of interest in science concepts and an obsession with sexuality and disrupting the classroom order.

This rationality is made more explicit in the lyrics of Eminem, filled with a lack of respect for authority figures and violent and sexual imagery. Adults are vulnerable to teenagers working in low-level positions at fast food restaurants who might spit on their food or disrupt family dinners by tearing through the parking lot with their stereos playing loudly, cursing and making obscene gestures. Such teens are not likely to be positioned as individuals with agency, able to make rational choices or take moral responsibility.

The students in the SLD class do not seem to have access to alternative positionings. This lack of access results not only from the perception of students with LD’s limited metacognitive, self-help, reasoning, and interpersonal skills, but also their

inability to use discursive practices and to be recognized as legitimately doing so. In Chapter Five much was made of the students' desire to take up the position of good students and their belief that hard work made such a position possible. The rationality that those who are smart do not have to work hard, that for the intelligent success comes "naturally" also works on and through students. It also makes their take up of the subject position of successful student illegitimate from that point of view.

Positioned as Lacking Social Resources

Colby, Jennifer, Michael and Ramon have limited access to other people who will take up as legitimate their positioning of themselves as agents. The rationalities that these four students are best educated in settings separated from their regular education peers and that bad kids can rub off on good kids function to limit their access to such individuals. While they do have access to teachers who see such positioning as legitimate, there are few people outside of the classroom who view them in the same way. The video data shows that the students in the SLD classroom, while eager to position themselves as powerful and agentic, do not recognize their peers when they attempt to do the same. Adults have a difficult time seeing adolescents as agentic. Regular education students that Colby, Jennifer, and Michael associate with in homeroom and exploratory classes do not see such positioning as legitimate but try to make them feel "down, sad, angry and stuff." Mr. Raklas sees such a positioning not as a sign of a good student but rather as further evidence of the students' disabilities.

Another rationality that limits the access that the students have to other people who will take their positioning of themselves as agents as legitimate is that of bad students rubbing off on good students. One reason that students labeled LD are

segregated from their regular education peers is the fear that their presence in the regular classroom will slow or water down instruction. In this way disability is seen as “catching” in that a slowdown would mean that all students would need remediation. In the story of Mr. Raklas, the tables are turned when he feared that including the students with SLD in his science classroom would result in their picking up the “normal” bad behaviors of his adolescent students.

And So...

In this chapter I used rhizoanalysis in an effort to think differently than I was thinking and perceive differently than I was seeing, so that I could continue looking at all. By brainstorming the many rationalities that were implicit in the data and looking at what they had to say to us, how they worked to shape and subject us, I pushed beyond finding the “one right answer” and found many answers instead. Linking the rationalities with the various pieces of data, I began to see the ways different discourses worked to limit the students’ possibilities for agency. This analysis was a gradual process, and at various points I was almost immobilized by what I saw as the violence that dominant discourses, rationalities, and lack of resources worked upon my students. I saw little room for resistance in situations that made distinguishing between violence and relations of power difficult. I viewed myself as complicit in the dominant discourses of schooling-as-usual and the good special educator and struggled for methods that would disrupt rather than reinscribe those discourses. I continued to try to make the dominant discourses explicit but shared with students that it must be confusing to hear me describe them as both smart and SLD. In the middle of one of these discussions, Jennifer related that she was glad to know how to describe herself. The students did not stop calling each other “SLD” and at

the time of this writing still enjoy writing sentences such as “Michael is SLD” on the whiteboard and making fun of “retarded” students as I struggle with how to respond. I have grown more sympathetic of the stigmatizing effects of placement in a special class and try to be patient when the students are shy about coming in and out of the classroom or walk fifteen feet away from me in the hallways. What I see as the hyper-masculine, stiff upper lip discourse is not one I wish to use any longer, but I am left to struggle with what discourse(s) to take up instead.

The possibilities for students in the self-contained classroom to be powerful/agentive are limited. An understanding of how the dominant discourses limit such possibilities for students positioned as other than normal improves the chances that students will have opportunities to change or resist those discourses. My effort to find agency in narratives from the classroom could be read as simply a way for me to feel better about what has been done to these students both by the humanist/rationalist discourse of schooling and me as an agent of that discourse. In this way, I too am subjected to the same discourses that shape my students.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

They are, in the final analysis, just fragments, and it is up to you or me to see what we can make of them. For my part, it has struck me that I might have seemed a bit like a whale that leaps to the surface of the water disturbing it momentarily with a tiny jet of spray and lets it be believed, or pretends to believe, or wants to believe, or himself does in fact indeed believe, that down in the depths where no one sees him any more, where he is no longer witnessed nor controlled by anyone, he follows a more profound, coherent and reasoned trajectory. Well, anyway, that was more or less how I at least conceived the situation; it could be that you perceived it differently. (Foucault, 1980, p, 79)

Introduction

In each of the preceding chapters, I have discussed the goals for this study. These goals reflected my desires, seemingly contradictory, that others see our practices, our experiences, as both familiar and transgressive. It seems that this study has been a study of such contradictions, contradictions that poststructural theory tells us should be embraced, pushed, and prodded in order to create new spaces, spaces where new ways of thinking, new subject positions, might come to be. Lest this sound too hopeful, however, Weedon (1997) reminds us that as subjects of a range of conflicting discourses we are subjected to their contradictions at great emotional cost. This study discovered a number of costs, and benefits as well, in the process of deconstructing the literacy practices of four students in a self-contained classroom and discourses in the classroom that

contributed to the positioning of those students as simultaneously literate/able and illiterate/disabled.

It seems that the findings of this study can be summed up in a nutshell. Implementing a constructivist curriculum in a self-contained SLD classroom is complicated and difficult for a variety of practical as well as theoretical reasons. Issues such as the availability and selection of materials, incorporation of student and parent goals and the nature and experiences of learners with LD's intersect with conflicting discourses and rationalities present in the classroom, school, and field of education. The four participants were agentic in some ways, primarily by taking up the subject position of successful student in the self-contained classroom. As they ventured out of that classroom, however, a lack of resources limited their agency and led to feelings of powerlessness.

At first glance such findings seem to create yet another binary – students who are agentic in the self-contained classroom and not so agentic outside of it. To think of the findings in terms of a binary, however, would be not only too easy but inaccurate as well. The students who were able at times to take up the subject position of successful student in the self-contained class were not always able to do so, and each of the students were able to get it right in some ways outside of the classroom. There were also students in the self-contained class not included in this study who seemed to find more opportunities to get it right outside of the SLD classroom than within. The findings spoke to me and suggested that I find ways for more students inside of the classroom to take up the position of good student more of the time, while at the same time I needed to create new

spaces and find the resources necessary for students to become agentic outside of the classroom.

Where it Goes and What it Does There

So now the study is complete, the data collected and analyzed, the report written and rewritten. Where does the study go, and what does it do there? I struggled with this question for some time. Where does it go for whom? For myself, the students, practitioners, the “field?” Which field? Literacy, special education, poststructural research? My hopes for the research seemed to be as rhizomatic and difficult to trace as the analysis itself had been.

I struggled with the traditional sense of a study “going somewhere,” which seemed to include its publication in scholarly journals, contribution to my securing professorships at research universities, or being publishing in book format. This traditional sense cramped my thinking as I imagined what parts of the study might be relevant to which journals, how my research interests would read to search committees, and what audiences might find such a book relevant. Perhaps not surprisingly, upon analysis the results of such thinking did not “fit” very well with what I had come to hope the study would “do.” Successful completion of many dissertation studies could lead to any or all of these things.

I began this study with a desire to use poststructural theory in a real live situation, to deconstruct my own and my students’ practices rather than that of another teacher or class that might be working from a different theoretical framework. At the end of the study I have discovered that I still have no desire to look only at theory, in this case what “might” happen as a result of this study, or perhaps more accurately, as a result of others

reading this study. Due to the nature of dissertation studies, I write this conclusion many months after data collection and analysis ended. It is difficult for me to write of what might be in a distant future as the results of this study are rewritten for various venues, when I continue to be immersed in the research setting and am able to see the ways that “the study” is reworking and reshaping that space. So perhaps in conclusion I should begin from there to trace what it might mean for “the field.”

The Last Narrative (Perhaps): September 2001

The kids were starting to come in from their exploratory classes. Corrina sat at her desk, organizing her new school supplies. Javone came in, quickly gave Ms. Bowles a hug, and started talking loudly to Timmy. Carlos was sitting in the reading center, trying to sneak in one more book to take a quiz on. Ms. Bowles was attempting to get organized, putting materials from the previous day’s lesson back on the shelf. Suddenly the door flew open and a small boy stuck his head in the room and yelled, “When are you getting me a laptop?” Without waiting for an answer, he ran off down the hallway, letting the door slam shut behind him.

“Who was that?” asked Mrs. Lee.

“Oh, just one of Ms. Williams’ kids. Every time I go out of the room someone is asking me to get them a laptop.”

“Well, Tonya was telling me that the KLICK! club is the talk of the school. Everyone wants to sign up. This morning some of the kids in your literacy block were asking for flyers.”

Ms. Bowles felt the other children listening. “Yeah, all of a sudden this is the place to be I guess.”

Mrs. Lee picked up on the cue and replied, “Yup, you all have gone from the bottom of the barrel all the way to the top. Everyone wants to be in here now.”

Turning quickly as if she had just noticed that all of the children had arrived, Ms. Bowles called out, “All right everybody, what are you doing? Get started on your math. The assignment is on the board...” It was the same way that she began each day. “Hurry up, you only have fifteen minutes until I go over this with you.” She shot a look over at Mrs. Lee, who met her gaze immediately. They both smiled.

I share this last vignette in order to take apart a particular instance of where this study has gone, for myself, the students, and the school, as well as what this journey might have to say for the fields of literacy, special education, and poststructural research. It represents an instance of the creation of new spaces for students served in special education programs at Southside, spaces in which they might find access to the resources needed for agency and take up positions that are other than disabled or illiterate.

This vignette takes one of the research findings, that using technology helps the participants “get it right” as students, and shows what I was able to do when I used poststructural theory to look at what seemed to be a new binary of inside/outside the SLD classroom. This study has allowed me to feel that I am “getting it right” as a teacher, yet it also pressured me to take more responsibility for the spaces outside of my own classroom.

In this vignette, the subject position of SLD student is under erasure. Colby, along with two other students, has received the laptop computer specified in his IEP and is using it in the regular classroom, resource room, and self-contained class. The notion that Colby is “retarded” or a “slow learning dummy” is being troubled by the knowledge that he has been entrusted with the use of an expensive piece of equipment and can be observed using it to perform tasks such as taking notes, answering textbook questions, playing “cool” video games, and organizing his song collection. That students ask me if I can get them a laptop makes it clear that they understand that Colby has such a privilege because he is associated with me, the “SLD teacher.” Colby’s regular teacher shared that other students are saying that they wish they could have extra help and have begun asking if they too can use a laptop in class if they bring one from home. In this way, one could say that Colby is shaping the landscape of the regular classroom. As Colby controls who is able to hold or use his laptop, he is read as a person with power in his regular and special education classes.

The pressure that I felt after completing this study to take more responsibility for the spaces outside of my own classroom led directly to the creation of the KCLICK! clubhouse Mrs. Lee and I discuss above. Taking up the subject position of “researcher” provided me with resources that I needed for agency. As a researcher, I had access to rationalities and practices that I might not have had otherwise. The rationality that teachers use technology in schools to support their own goals and agendas and that students are able to use technology only to work toward teachers’ goals was one that I accessed during the course of the study as I struggled with how to get students to complete assignments on the computer rather than simply “waste time playing.” Research

by Alvermann, O'Brien, and Zhao reflects the tension I felt when there never seemed to be enough time to do both what the students and I wanted to do with technology. My position of researcher allowed me to attend conferences and network with other researchers, resulting in my learning more about the after-school technology clubhouse model and traveling to Michigan State to meet with Yong Zhao and the Michigan site coordinators. Visible signs that I had gotten it right as a student/researcher such as successfully defending my dissertation research encouraged my new administrators to accept a proposal for a KCLICK! clubhouse at Southside which includes flexible planning time for me as coordinator. In this way, I will be able to write grants and secure funding to extend the clubhouse model across Georgia. My position as "KCLICK! Coordinator" is visible across the school and has placed my position as "SLD Teacher" under erasure as well. This is but one way in which this study, while specific to a particular context, has grown beyond that context and has the potential to affect policy and practice statewide. What this study has to say to the fields of literacy, special education, and poststructural research is described in further detail below.

Literacy

After almost a decade of emphasis on the problem of students in the primary grades who struggle to learn to read and write, the literacy community is beginning to acknowledge that in spite of literacy reforms at the primary level, many adolescents struggle to read and write effectively or choose not to read and write in school settings. Research on the literate practices of adolescents both inside and outside of school indicates that such practices can differ dramatically and that many students appear to be both illiterate and literate simultaneously. The vignette above suggests ways in which

schools can provide literacy opportunities for students that are more closely aligned with their own purposes and desires. The balance between what teachers feel burdened to teach and what students are interested in learning is difficult to strike and implement in curricular decisions. The traditional canon, texts that “belong” to adolescents such as movie scripts and song lyrics, and the ongoing proliferation of new forms of text such as the Internet and e-books all clamor for inclusion in the curriculum with little guidance for teachers regarding how to balance instruction. Teachers of adolescents who read below a second grade level must also find ways to integrate strategies typically reserved for young children into the curriculum in ways that older learners will accept and take up.

The pressure I felt to balance all of what I felt the students needed within the five hours reserved for instruction in the core academic areas is felt by teachers everywhere. New spaces are indeed needed, not just spaces in which students labeled SLD can be seen as other than illiterate or disabled, but spaces in which all students can use literacy skills as a tool with which to recognize the conflicting discourses they are caught up in and choose or change those positions. Such spaces can be created both within and outside of the traditional school day.

Special Education

Adults such as teachers, parents, administrators, and legislators have long regarded special education services as a privilege. For students, however, placement in a special education classroom is often seen as stigmatizing. The participants in this study had access to few of the resources necessary for agency and often felt powerless to take up the subject positions that they desired. The vignette shows some ways that special education teachers can provide access to resources that support student agency. Being

assigned a laptop computer defines Colby not only as belonging to the SLD class but separate as well – he is now able to take a class outside the SLD classroom. Students served in the SLD classroom still belong to that collective, but with the transformation of the classroom into the KLICK! clubhouse after school, they will be able to join a new collective as well, one in which their disabilities are minimized and their status as experts is highlighted. Both participation in the clubhouse and the use of laptops provide students with ways to bring about alternative positionings by demonstrating knowledge, skills, and the ability to use relevant discourses that many of their peers lack. In this way, students may begin to see special education placement as both privileging and stigmatizing.

The analysis that occurred as part of this study encouraged me to specify the use of a laptop computer and digital camcorder in Colby, Jennifer, and Michael's IEP's. This in turn led another special education teacher to do the same. The presence of three laptops in the school has caused something of a sensation, and opened the door for other special education students to question the IEP process and assert their needs for laptops as well. The question of who needs a laptop and for what purposes will continue to be asked as each student's IEP meeting is held. What is right and true about the tradition that dictates laptops are useful primarily as text readers or alternatives for illegible handwriting? Why would their use as a vehicle for web page design or Flash animation be any less valuable? Should how the use of a laptop changes the way students are positioned in the regular classroom be considered important when deciding if one is needed? These are questions that I did not think to ask before, thoughts I did not know to think.

Poststructural Research

The fact that we are discussing a vignette at all in this, the conclusion to a research study, points to the influence of poststructural methodology on research at the beginning of the 21st century. There are many ways that this study and the methodology used to complete it are important to the field of poststructural research, but perhaps the most important to me is suggested by this final vignette. In the end, this remains a study of four students, the relationships they have with each other and with their teacher, and their literate practices in a particular classroom. I wanted to apply poststructural theory to a place where other theories are dominant, to look at the subjectification (and subjectivity) of four students in an SLD self-contained classroom, the classroom that I was responsible for every day. I was cautious of “retreating to arrogant theory or silly romance about heroic life on the ground” (Fine & Weis, 1996) and sensitive to criticism that many of those pleading for researchers to be critical and self-reflexive have stopped collecting data altogether. The data collected in the course of this study and the analysis that emerged suggests that there remains much to be gained from applying high theory to life on the ground. This study works to deconstruct the theory/practice binary and troubles the notion that practitioners are not consumers or producers of educational theory.

This study also provided a variety of “writing-stories” (Richardson, 1995) that explained how I came to think differently and the methods that I used, particularly during the process of rhizoanalysis. While not providing a recipe for rhizoanalysis, the steps that I followed were described in detail. This process was used once again in the writing of

the final vignette, allowing my thoughts to dance along unrestricted as I thought of the ways that this study has affected my current practice.

And So...

Examining the experiences of students in a self-contained classroom, a classroom that I was responsible for, was often a painful process. The pain the students felt at times when they were not able to eclipse their positions of disabled, illiterate, “special,” continued to leave me angry, frustrated, and sad. I am convinced that improving the quality of instruction in my own classroom, while important, is not sufficient work to do in the project of helping students placed in self-contained programs become agentic and maintain their access to powerful subject positions. At the same time, I am aware of what Davies (2000b) describes as a fault line in deconstructive work that

appears when the assumption is made that the deconstructive work will erase the categories such that they can no longer do the work that they were doing. At most, deconstruction can only trouble categories – they still exist and still hold power, albeit a power that is shifted. This conceptual error comes about through the difficulty for Western thinkers of holding opposites in mind without at the same time succumbing to the desire to abandon one of them. (p. 201-202)

If the category of learning disabled will not fall away as a result of deconstruction, perhaps the work of teachers and researchers lies in helping students with disabilities “recognize the limits imposed upon them but also seek to test these limits” (Allen, 1999, p. 112), to use the force between the inalienable opposition between able and disabled “in an issue of identification that is required of those who must engage

further in political struggle...in order to name oppression and deal with it” (Davies, 2000b, p. 203). Such a task seems worthwhile and necessary work to take up.

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APPENDIX A

STUDENTS SERVED IN SLD SELF-CONTAINED CLASSROOM DURING THE COURSE OF THE STUDY

1999-2000		
Student	Quarter	Subjects Served in Self-Contained Class
Antoine	1,2,3,4	LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies
Bartholomew	1,2,3, 4	LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies LA/Reading, Math
Billy	2	Science/Social Studies
Briana	1 2,3,4	LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies LA/Reading, Science/Social Studies
Colby	1,2,3,4	LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies
Dominic	1 2,3 4	LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies Science/Social Studies LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies
Hennesey	1,2	LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies
Jack	4	LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies
Jamar	1,2 3,4	LA/Reading, Science/Social Studies LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies
Jawan	1,2,3,4	LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies
Jennifer	1,2,3,4	LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies
Jessica	3	LA/Reading
Jim	2	Science/Social Studies
Jonathon	1 2,3	LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies LA/Reading, Science/Social Studies
Mia	4	LA/Reading, Math
Michael	1,2,3,4	LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies
Ned	4	LA/Reading
Pete	4	Language Arts/Reading
Ramon	2,3,4	LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies
Rasheen	1,2,3,4	LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies

Richard	1,2 3,4	LA/Reading, Science/Social Studies LA/Reading
Thomas	1,2,3,4	LA/Reading, Science/Social Studies
Timmy	3,4	LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies

2000-2001		
Student	Quarter	Subjects Served in Self-Contained Class
Bartholomew	1,2,3,4	Math
Carlos	2 3,4	LA/Reading LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies
Christie	2,3,4	LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies
Colby	1,2,3,4	LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies
Dominic	1,2,3,4	Math
Hymie	1,2,3,4	LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies
Jamar	1,2,3,4	LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies
Jennifer	1,2,3,4	LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies
Kate	1,2,3,4	Math
Michael	1,2,3,4	LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies
Steven	1,2,3,4	LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies
Timothy	1 1,2	LA/Reading, Science/Social Studies Science/Social Studies
Tonya	4	LA/Reading
Zachariah	3	LA/Reading, Math, Science/Social Studies
Zeke	1 1,2	LA/Reading, Science/Social Studies Science/Social Studies