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Positioning in a Primary Writing Workshop: Joint Action in the Discursive Production of Writing Subjects

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Drawn from a year-long study in a combined first- and second-grade classroom, this article presents an interpretive portrait of two young students engaged in spontaneous talk while writing. We analyze their conversations to explore the subject positions these student writers assumed, those they assigned each other, and the related functions they assigned the texts they composed. Through our close reading of their conversations, we develop an analytic protocol for positional microanalysis of everyday conversations that honors the intertwined social and emotional dimensions of peer interactions. Countering those who would cast literacy development as the sequential attainment of discrete cognitive skills, we consider the ways that these social and emotional dimensions may interlace with intellectual growth as young children struggle to become students, writers, and people.

In today's public conversations about education, it is almost always assumed that literacy growth reflects the sequential accumulation of bits of skill and knowledge. The assumption of a linear path of learning and development underlies almost every aspect of education policy and media coverage, from the articulation of standards, to the consequences of testing, to judgments about school and teacher quality. Politicians, reporters, and almost everyone who talks back to them view the moments children spend in school as moments of opportunity to build the linear path of cognitive achievement. Because this public conversation is so aggressively ubiquitous, teachers cannot help but participate in its discourse, even when their own voices are not heeded.

But teachers know that more than cognitive accumulation is going on in classroom life. They know that students are, even as they engage in "school work," also engaged in the life work of negotiating power, privilege, and closeness with the others around them. For the real people doing the learning, there is often no separating cognitive achievement from the ability to act like someone who is capable

of that achievement. To assure the literate growth of all students and to respond to the needs of those who struggle, it is imperative that educators understand how the complexities of classroom life shape students' literacy activities and learning.

If we accept Vygotsky's (1986) premise that children take today's interactions into tomorrow's thinking, then classroom interactions during children's work in literacy matter a great deal for their learning and achievement. If we're to understand the nature of what is available for students to internalize, we need close and careful examinations of what goes on in classroom interactions—not just of whole-class settings, or conversations structured and controlled by teachers, but also of peer interactions in classrooms that have intricate structures permitting students some freedom in their ways of being together. Qualitative studies of schooling, which are at present systematically excluded from policy conversations, have been especially helpful in identifying the *what* of schooling—that is, we learn from such studies not what might be a good idea, not what approach is “best” at raising test scores, but what is actually occurring in the minute-by-minute living of life in classrooms (Erickson & Gutiérrez, 2003). If we think of what is *achieved* in achievement as mature participation in a society, not just scores on tests, then we must understand that achievement as emerging from the ways intricate interpersonal activity develops into habits and dispositions that are at once intellectual, relational, and emotional. Observation of naturalistic classroom contexts is the only way that achievement-in-process can become visible.

This article is about young children talking as they write. We present an interpretive case study focusing on spontaneous conversations between primary-age children when they sit together and compose during a writing workshop in school. We analyze these conversations to explore the positions these young writers assume, those they assign each other, and the related functions they assign the texts they're writing. We spent a school year in a primary classroom as observers, with degrees of participation that varied as the year progressed, watching the interactions among pairs of writing friends. We explored these interactions as zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86), populated by real people doing social things, not just sites of cognitive scaffolding. As a result of our explorations, we present here a theoretical framework for the study of positioning and its significance in understanding children's literacy development. Through a close reading of a conversation between two girls, we develop an analytic protocol for positional microanalysis of everyday conversations. Our purpose is to use the theoretic notion of positioning to examine the intertwined social and emotional dimensions of peer interactions and the ways they may interlace with cognitive dimensions of development as young children struggle to become, yes, students and writers—but also particular people.

We will examine below an extended conversation that occurred in a primary-grade classroom's writing workshop, paying particular attention to the relational

work carried out there. By relational work, we mean the evidence of energy expended in two people's constant maneuvering about "who I am," "who you are," and "what is going on between us." As we will discuss further below, this kind of relational work is always a dimension of Vygotsky's "intermental plane," or the spaces between people in which learning must first appear (Vygotsky, 1986; Wertsch, 1991). Our analysis examines the subject positions (Davies & Harré, 1990; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998) children took on and those they ascribed to others, that is, who they acted as if they were and who they treated their partners as being. As they dealt with one another, writers also assigned social functions to their texts-in-progress, and so we examine how the children used these artifacts in the flow of their identity claims. To refine this notion of positioning, we analyze genres of positioning—that is, the form of speech acts and the means by which positions were assigned and taken up—and also the moral storylines (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999) in which these positions were situated. We also interrogate the discursive resources on which the children drew in their positional improvisations—the possible sites wherein and means by which these children became familiar with these storylines and character types. Throughout, our purpose is to develop theory about the complex interactions that contribute to the formation of dispositions and identities with respect to the activity underway, that is, the ways young children begin to form themselves and one another as particular writers.

We add our voices to those of others, some of whom we review below, who have explored relational dimensions of schooling and literacy and who have taken identity as part of learning (Bartholomae, 1985; Dyson, 1993; Gallas, 1998; Gee, 1990; Leander, 2002b; Rowe, Fitch & Bass, 2001). Three things distinguish our contribution here. First, we have conducted microanalysis on extended conversations among students to show how subject positions are fluid and continuously shifting with nearly every utterance. Second, we have taken the textual object as a third party that is always positioned to function socially in relation to *I* and *You*. Third, we take positioning as part of the environment for academic learning, and thus interpret the ways "writing" as a school subject is inextricable from "who I am when I'm writing." These analytic decisions not only permit a fine-grained analysis, but also provide a framework for looking at the relationship between academic work and positioning.

This relationship is important for educators to understand because many decisions about children's lives are made in the interest of producing the "best" or "most" academic achievement. Without an understanding of the social and personal dimensions that are always a part of the same interactions that produce academic growth, educators may be at cross purposes. In order to create real growth, especially growth that will endure outside of school, it is crucial to examine not just what skills are being developed, but also what kind of people are being devel-

oped—that is, the moral, relational, and emotional dimensions that cannot be extricated from academic achievement.

Conceptual Framework

Talk in Writing Workshops

The popular pedagogy known as writing workshop is built upon the assumption that learners internalize talk, and that the voices writers internalize become those with which they think when they write (Graves, 1983; Sowers, 1985; Vygotsky, 1986). Writing workshop is, to some extent, defined by its structures, such as mini-lessons, writing conferences, peer conferences, response groups, and share time (Atwell, 1989; Calkins, 1986), all structures that Bakhtin would call “speech genres” (1986)—that is, stable, socially defined types of utterances. The intention of workshop advocates is that these speech genres are to become ways of thinking helpful for writing. In order for this transformation in thinking to occur, the learner must appropriate these patterned interactions and make them part of her/his inner world—asking similar questions, posing similar problems, and applying similar lenses (McCarthy, 1994; Sperling, 1990). The nature of talk in writing workshops, then, is of crucial importance to its pedagogy, not simply in terms of the words spoken, but also the concepts, habits, dispositions, cultures, and relationships exchanged and negotiated in and around the words (Daiute & Dalton, 1993; Dyson, 1983, 1993; Larson, 1999).

The pervasiveness of talk in writing workshops, especially in the early years of school, has been established in the literature on classroom writing (Daiute & Dalton, 1993; Dixon-Krauss, 1996; Dyson, 1983, 1993; Larson, 1999). Not all of this talk occurs in official genres and settings (Dyson, 1993). In fact, most of the talk is informal, among children who sit near one another and who talk quite a lot as they compose. This is especially true of children early in their careers as writers. Young children often externalize their rehearsal for writing, speaking aloud before they write and as they write, in order to articulate a plan and also to hear the language (the phonemes, early on) of the message they intend to write. In a late return to a revised egocentric speech (Vygotsky, 1986), they form aloud their intentions, purposes, audiences, textual design, and stylistic plans. However, other people around them can (and do) hear them and talk back. This means that throughout the process of writing, young writers are socially visible and vulnerable, and that the text itself often becomes an occasion for negotiating relationships. Young writers’ talk, therefore, fulfills different but interpenetrating functions that are at once cognitive and relational.

When we began the participant observation from which we collected data for this study, we held assumptions similar to those of other teachers and researchers about the role of talk in the writing workshop (Graves, 1983; Sowers, 1985). We expected talk to fulfill several cognitive compositional functions. These included

planning and scaffolding writerly decision making; getting help with spelling, diction, or phrasing; externalizing (orally) syllables and phonemes or sequences of letters in order to invent spellings; rehearsing the text the writer would make; reading the text from its beginning in order to refresh the writer's memory and decide what to write next; consulting the writer's drawing in order to plan the words of the text; determining how much is left to write; playing with the aesthetic qualities of language; and testing the possible responses of an ultimate audience. Thus, we understood talk as fulfilling wholly rational goals in writing. Some of these functions of talk were indeed present in our data. However, as we attempted to understand the participants' own understandings of these events, these ostensibly cognitive acts rarely seemed to be the most significant. The figuring-out of a writing problem may have motivated the utterance to a degree, but each utterance could also be understood as interactional and motivated to achieve a social action or perlocutionary force (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1970; van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). That is, the speaker spoke in order to effect a change in the intentional, emotional, or positional state of the interlocutor, not simply to think through a problem with the writing itself.

If a young writer utters aloud an invented spelling of a word, she acts in a context of relationships with specific other people around her. The spelling aloud, then, is not *only* a rehearsal for writing, but also a performance that is offered and taken socially (Rowe et al., 2001). The child risks that someone else may say that word is "easy" or that, hearing the word, someone else might decide to write about the same thing (Dyson, 1993). Newkirk (1989) points out that sometimes talk is not so much a rehearsal for writing as writing is a rehearsal for talk. The event of making a text itself produces conversations. The writing that remains on a page is, in some ways, a lingering shadow of the thicker, multi-modal transactions in face-to-face human mutuality.

What is in the immediate learning environment, available to be internalized, is not only talk about writing, but also ways of being with others and ways of being a writer among other writers. A sociocultural theory of learning suggests that individuals appropriate from the cultural material at hand. Learners improvise and make new cultural products, transforming the givens, but they work from what they are given (Cole, 1996; Holland, et al., 1998; Shotter, 1993; Wertsch, 1991). Here, we are examining the resources that appear to be available as children piece together selves for writing. It may be possible to imagine writing as assembled from environmental elements that are purely cognitive; but *me writing* must be assembled from a complex social milieu. As learners negotiate these complexities, a number of pressing questions arise: "What will they let me say about myself and my text? What can or can't I get away with doing? How do I have to respond to them to keep them out of my identity territory?" The answers to those questions

(provided by proximal others) are as available for appropriation as are spelling patterns, and they play at least as significant a part in becoming a writer.

Peer relations in literacy classrooms have drawn scrutiny in recent years, with a number of researchers finding interactions among students potentially problematic in that they are often characterized by power struggles (Almasi & Russell, 2000; Alvermann, 1996; Flint, 2000; Gallas, 1998; Koshewa, 1999; Lensmire, 1994a; Lewis, 1997; West, 1996). In some of these accounts, while the teacher may attempt to control, adjust, or tame the peer interactions, relations become risky where the teacher's authority recedes. Lensmire has characterized writing workshops as "carnival," borrowing Bakhtin's (1984) idea, to describe a space wherein people can subvert usually authoritative discourses and rule systems and enact more elaborated resistance and possibility (Lensmire, 1994b; see also Swaim, 2002). In all of these studies, there is a persistent, recognizable impulse on students' parts to cut loose, to overthrow adult regulation of language norms, politeness, and identity boundaries. From topic choice (Dyson, 1997; Lensmire, 1994a), to turn-taking and norms of mutual respect (Almasi, 1995; Alvermann, 1996; Flint, 2000; Koshewa, 1999), to seeking and giving help (Beaumont, 1999; West, 1996), peer interactions become spaces for performing status strata.

These shifting power relations are an element of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1986), i.e., those elements of a cultural environment to which the learner is attending, the meeting place of established cultural patterns and an individual's improvisational action. Usually, in discussing talk and writing, the zone of proximal development is understood to mean the next skill, strategy, or item of knowledge the learner will get from a teacher or more knowledgeable peer. We are here exploring a conception of the zone of proximal development that is packed with consequences both relational and cognitive. This relational dimension involves trying on what theorists have called subject positions.

Positioning Theory

Several literacy researchers (Almasi & Russell, 2000; Leander, 2002a, 2002b; Rowe, et al., 2001) have developed insights from the employment of what has come to be called "positioning theory" (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). Really a theme in many postmodern theories, the notion of positioning points to the ways people continually put on different selves and assign roles to other people. Like the theories of Kenneth Burke (1969) or Erving Goffman (1973, 1986), positioning theory is essentially dramaturgical, with a Burkean emphasis on actor and scene. The concept of positioning is related, but not identical, to Louis Althusser's notion of interpellation, or hailing, wherein ideologies call out to the subjectivities of individuals, recognizing them or recruiting them into pre-defined social roles (Althusser, 1971). In Althusser's view, language can position a subject because a position is always present in the ideology of which language is a manifestation. The

ideology and the subject positions language affords are determined by the relationship of varied social groups to the means of production. For Althusser, individuals therefore do not choose positions, since they are “always-already subjects” (p. 119). They may believe they possess free choice, but they are actually always subjected to the workings of state apparatuses (families, schools, workplaces, racial definitions) that make them desire and intend to inhabit the roles that ideology has already prepared for them.

Althusser’s perspective has been germinal, informing the work of educational researchers and theorists who see power structures as fairly fixed because social reality is structured to keep power working unilaterally. This is most clearly the case with structuralists, such as Varenne (1984); it would also sometimes be the case in more recent work, for instance among researchers working in Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995), such as Martin (1993) and Fairclough (1989). In ethnographic studies of classrooms, power relations may seem relatively fixed when researchers analyze student power positions as *status*, that is, as something individual students possess or as a role they permanently fill in classroom social structures (e.g., Lewis, 1997; West, 1996). Also, some earlier ethnographies make much of the roles available in classroom communities and discuss the ways students fill those roles (e.g., Collins & Green, 1992). It is in such accounts that a structuralist view of power, inherited from Althusser, seems most influential.

Despite the importance of Althusser’s view, some theorists and researchers have seen the relations among language, power, and positions as less unified and fixed in advance, and more complex, contradictory, and fluid (Mills, 1997). These scholars have been influenced by Foucault (1977), Butler (1990), and Hollway (1984), among others. Credited with introducing the concept of positioning into the social sciences (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999), Hollway (1984) employs Foucaultian theory to describe the ways traditional discourses concerning sexuality make available positions for subjects to take up. The practices and meanings of particular individuals always occur within discourses, and discourses contain positions, as a sentence contains subjects and objects. To speak within a discourse (and everyone always does), one must take up a position, and in so doing, place oneself in relation to others, as one would in taking the position of yielding, submissive female (Hollway, 1984, p. 236). Positions are relational, then, not only because they pertain to personal relations, but also because they structurally arrange those relations, like the grammatical forms in a sentence (if a position is to be “female” in a particular way, for instance, a corresponding position of “male” must be established).

Subject positions are almost constantly in flux and are often contested, as compared with the relatively fixed conceptual nature of interpellations, identities, roles, or actors (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). Furthermore, acts of positioning are agentive, ascribed by an individual to both self and other. Multiple selves are

continuously formed, re-formed, and changed entirely in a “changing sea” of “joint action” (Shotter, 1993, p. 38). One conversational partner hails another as a particular identity, and the partner rejects that role, calling on an entirely different storyline, or else accepts the role for a few minutes until the conversational horizon shifts and a different social proposition, a new particular *I/You* is enacted. Social structures must continually be re-made on the fly as people evaluate and hold one another accountable for the appropriateness of their actions, words, and understandings (Garfinkel, 1967). As Holland and her colleagues point out, the assignment and taking up of positions is improvisational (Holland et al., 1998), and the fact that participants are drawing upon discursive resources does not mean that they are trapped into ready-made cultural patterns, as they can do new things with the old material.

This social work is done in and through language, if one understands “language” as including all semiosis, including image, gesture, and inflection. Every bit of language in the continuous stream of dialogue is an action, and every action assumes a social position for the agent as well as others in the scope of the action. It is not that, every once in a while, a speaker positions herself and her interlocutors. Rather, the positions are already present in the language resources available, and any conversational move an individual makes must be understood as adopting social positions. Participants construct their knowledge of reality along the horizon of conversation, always (within this immediate, formative context) open to shifting modifications by an individual (Shotter, 1993). Language is not the product of cognitive abilities or previously fixed realities; rather, what we do and say, as moments of joint action go by, mediates our cognition and our knowledge of the world. All learning, therefore, involves appropriation not simply of realities or language, but of the structured social positions and storylines through which we participate in language and construct realities.

In order to speak, a person casts herself and the person to whom she is speaking as *those two characters from that story we both know*. Van Langenhove and Harré (1999) use the term *storylines* to name the typified situations in which positions and acts of positioning fit. Storylines are not full narratives, but rather are like kinds of dramatic scenes in which one finds predictable *dramatis personae*. One storyline, for example, might involve positions of nurse and patient (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, p. 21). As soon as one calls to mind those positions, one also imagines complex sets of predictable, stereotypic attitudes and interactions. In another example from van Langenhove and Harré, if one person tells another to “iron my shirts,” the utterance invokes a storyline of master and servant, with the utterer claiming the right to make such a demand and the interlocutor positioned as someone obliged to respond. The interlocutor, of course, can resist or reject this positioning, but the position and the storyline are socially real and must be dealt with. Positioning, then, is more than simply treating people as if they are *x*,

since it involves defining this social moment as being of γ type. The claim is not simply that *I/you are these types of characters*, but that *we are in this storyline that carries a particular type of relationship*.

Positions are moral in nature, in that they bear upon “nurturance or injury to the basic being of a person” (Shotter, 1993, p. 38). This “most basic being” involves being secure in a sense of belonging. People only get that kind of security if other people in a group treat the individual as if her or his sayings and doings are legitimate. Because this sense of belonging is so basic, people work on it fairly constantly in their positioning of themselves and others. Positions manage which persons are entitled to say and do what, who is in and out of particular groups and roles, and who has access to particular spaces, activities, genres, and voices (Holland et al., 1998). Positions, then, instantiate relations of power, but not always in a simple binary of up/down or hierarchy of higher/lower. Storylines, discourses, and genres narrativize power relations in particular ways, so the qualitative dimensions of positioning will always inscribe power as working in a complex, multi-directional manner, and the particular nature of a given positioning event will be shaped by the discourse or “figured world” in which it occurs (Holland et al., 1998; Smith, 1990).

With positioning so basic to being, belonging, and becoming, it must be the case that people are likely to *feel* strongly about the way they are positioned in a situation, especially if that position contrasts with the ways they want to position themselves. Emotions, thinking, and power relations, then, are unified in an analysis of positioning. It is not possible to separate some ethereal emotional substance from the hard doing of thought and power. As DiPardo and Schnack (2004, p. 17) have written, “From an expanded Vygotskian perspective, the interpsychic meanings that become the raw material of intrapsychic thought are saturated with emotion, as are the contexts in which they take shape.” An examination of positioning helps us to see how such saturated contexts work, as emotion, power, and thought are united in joint action.

In examining the sources of positions, we must note that, in any interaction, the participants are not merely in the here and now. The context of the larger culture is always imported to immediate contexts, including those in which writers write (Clark & Ivanic, 1997). The participants in a writing event (writers, readers, others) share some elements from their participation in a shared culture. They differ, however, in their commitments and in those aspects of the culture with which they have most aligned themselves. There will always, therefore, be struggle and slippage, despite a world of shared assumptions. The entire culture, moreover, is not unilaterally brokered into a context or situation, since only those elements of the culture that are available to and appropriated by a particular individual will be brought into the immediate environment of writing. Furthermore, participants in a given setting will resist the privileging of some cultural dimen-

sions and will conform to others. In the context of these social negotiations, a writer constructs positions for self and other, "grounded in a difficult, usually subconscious assessment of the competing ideologies and power relations in the immediate social context of writing. By accommodating to or resisting dominant positionings, writers participate in the struggle over which practices, discourses, and subject positions will dominate in the future" (Clark & Ivanic, 1997, p. 151). The repertoire of available storylines and subject positions cannot be made up out of thin air, but rather is derived from types in the larger culture that have been available to the individual prior to this interaction (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). Not only can people not act in a way that is brand new, but they also cannot employ subject positions and storylines to which they have not had access. Agency—an individual's ability to choose acts of positioning—does not extend completely outside this cultural-experiential circumscription.

In the conversations that comprise the data corpus in the present study, we examine the positions children take up and ascribe to each other. It is important, too, to consider how these interactions might contribute to the creation of possible futures for these young student writers. In other words, what makes positions stick? For a theoretical account of how positions become durable, we turn to Holland and her colleagues, who use the word "dispositions" to describe positions that are stabilized enough in experience that an individual may appropriate them as a relatively permanent part of an identity (Holland et al., 1998). Some social positions become dispositions. That is not to say that they are immutable, but that they are at least habitual or accustomed within joint activity. Children and neophytes develop "a set of dispositions toward themselves in relation to where they can enter, what they can say, what emotions they can have, and what they can do in a given situation" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 143). Shotter (1993) suggests that individuals develop such dispositions through a Vygotskian process of internalization:

In learning how to be a responsible member of certain social groups, one must learn how *to do* certain things in the right kind of way: how to perceive, think, talk, act, and to experience one's surroundings in ways that make sense to the others around one. . . . Thus internalization is not a special geographical movement inwards, from a realm of bodily activity into a nonmaterial realm of "the mind," but a socio-practical-ethical movement, in which "children grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). And the child . . . learns . . . the 'ethical logistics' . . . of personal transactions within that group, the means to coordinate the different responsibilities involved in negotiating the social construction of meanings. (p. 46)

When children learn to do things with words, therefore, they learn not just skills or knowledge, but also the subject positions that have been made available in the transactions that produce the skills or knowledge. The world into which

they grow is one in which they can be particular people in particular situations. In examining a limited setting, such as a classroom, one must ask what kinds of positions seem to be available to individual children: Who can they be here? What are the ethical logistics they need to know in this group? Given that this is school, what does it mean to become a person here? What is enabled and what constrained?

Some schools attempt to adopt policies that take some of the broadest forms of positioning into account. When a decision is made not to track students, for example, it is sometimes in the interest of making more flexible subject positions available to students (Oakes, 1985; Wheelock, 1992). Attention to self-efficacy (Pajares, 1996) in the curriculum and in policies governing shared life in the school community are also attempts to open positions that might otherwise be unavailable. Multi-age classes and inclusion (even of severely handicapped children), both policies of the school in this study, may also be viewed as attempts to make a wider repertoire of positions available to students. In many schools, tensions exist between policies; for example, a school may have multi-age classrooms but the state may require high-stakes testing, a practice that presumes a number of years in school to dictate a particular "level" of achievement. Furthermore, the very fact that such policies as multi-age and heterogeneous grouping remain relatively rare in schools suggests strong cultural pressure to value the promise of instructional efficiency over the availability of a broad range of social positions in relation to fellow students.

The above multiple dimensions in a theory of positioning helped to orient us to our data. However, certain concepts were of particular utility in our analysis. As will be elaborated in our data analysis section below, in working with the scenes we studied, we paid particular attention to agentive, improvisational acts of positioning—the purposeful (if not always quite conscious) actions that made particular characters of *I*, *You*, and *This Text*. We took these as occurring continually throughout a scene, not just at certain moments. Every utterance (or silence where there might have been an utterance) was taken as a unit of analysis that included positioning. Because the positioning of self, other, and text are made coherent in the employment of storylines, we attributed to each utterance a particular storyline. We also categorized the varied acts of positioning as being particular kinds of social actions or speech genres. Further, we identified the likely cultural resources from which the children may have drawn those positioning acts. Such an analysis helped us to examine the relational dimensions of talk, where the object of academic work (the text) was also an element in the relational dynamic.

The following questions guided our inquiry:

- What relational dimensions are evident in talk among child peers in a writing workshop? How do they relate to cognitive dimensions of talk?
- What relational and cognitive affordances are present in the zones of proximal development produced as young children talk to each other

while they write? What are the relationships among these relational and cognitive dimensions?

- What elements of a theory of positioning illuminate young children's peer relations vis-à-vis writing?
- How does the interpersonal dynamic of peer interactions in a writing workshop suggest insights into literacy growth?

Methods

Given our interests in the interactions occurring in a specific setting (peer talk during writing workshop), a case study approach (Merriam, 1988) was an appropriate means to observation-based theory building (Flower, 1989). Because our research participants were young children, direct observation within the children's everyday world was also appropriate (Corsaro, 1981).

Setting and Participants

For our classroom case study, we selected a setting in which policies of the district, school, and classroom permitted as much flexibility as possible in the positions afforded to young children. We wanted to explore the kinds of positions that were available to children when those positions were not continually assigned from above and therefore required more continual negotiation among students. Though we knew positions would not be invented from scratch and that they would be drawn from cultural resources, we required a setting in which students at least had some agency in responding to one another. It was this requirement that informed our choice of a classroom in which a writing workshop was a centerpiece of the school day. The requirement that children claim an identity as writers who can make texts for wide and particular audiences is a special demand that writing workshops place on students. The act of writing itself requires that the writer take up a position and assign one to an audience, and the corporeal presence of others in a sort of backstage space of the writing process makes positioning all the more complex.

We conducted this research at an elementary school in a small city in the U.S., where the population was generally working class to middle class. The zoned area of the school included trailer parks, shelters, and subsidized housing, as well as modest single-family houses. Forty-nine percent of the school population was eligible for federally subsidized free or reduced lunch. Caucasian students were in the majority. In addition to our interest in the instructional approach of the school, we were attracted to it because of the diversity in social class and parental income among the students, despite the school's limited racial and ethnic diversity. This school had more children living in poverty than many other schools in the area, and our political commitments led us to want to examine positioning as it played out among children who tend to be socially more vulnerable.

The school was unusual in some of its programs compared with other schools in the district and state. There were no “straight grade” classrooms, only multi-age, with most containing a two-year spread. The children we write about here were in a first/second grade classroom. Both the principal and the teacher stated that multi-age grouping reflected their beliefs that children do not develop in lockstep with age-grade curricula, and that groupings in school should be less strictly bounded and more fluid, as in the world outside of school. They also stated a rationale that since learning is a function of relationships, children and teachers need longer times in communities together. Furthermore, they maintained, multi-age classrooms permit more efficiency, with less of the year spent on expectations and procedures since more experienced children can help to acculturate newcomers.

The school practiced full inclusion, which meant in this case that children with cerebral palsy, Downs syndrome, autism, and other severe developmental disabilities were in general education classrooms all the time. In other schools in the district (and most in the state), children with such conditions would have been in self-contained special education classrooms. This school’s extended inclusion policy reflected the principal’s commitment to what she saw as fairness, as well as a social world that reflected life outside of school. Inclusion and multi-age are unusual school policies in this district, this state, and this nation, so they are significant elements of the context. Furthermore, since these policies were intended to make relationships and positions available to students, they are relevant to our research purposes.

Other policies and programs in the school may have been contradictory to the values informing multi-age and inclusive classrooms. Every day the children were broken into leveled “literacy groups,” each of which met with an adult (utilizing classroom teachers, Reading Recovery teachers, and adult volunteers). These groupings were flexible, and in weekly meetings, the group of teachers often re-assigned students to “higher” or “lower” groups. This practice, in contrast to overall agendas of multi-age and inclusion groupings, afforded to the children’s conversations the concept of being higher or lower in literacy development. Other programs that may also have contributed to this vertical metaphor were Reading Recovery itself and a state-required administration of the CTBS. We mention these not to weigh their effectiveness or wisdom, but in order to provide some important context for understanding the resources upon which children might have drawn in their acts of positioning.

As we have mentioned, in this classroom, a writing workshop (Calkins, 1986) was a centerpiece of the school day and the literacy curriculum. In this case, that meant that writing occurred at a predictable time every day, that children worked across multiple days on texts about topics they chose, and that daily instruction occurred in a whole-class mini-lesson, individual writing conferences, and a share

time. Several times during the year, the teacher selected a genre in which everyone was asked to write: poetry, picture books, and memoir. In February, the teacher introduced writers' notebooks to the whole class, though a few of the older students had already been using them. Writers' notebooks in this setting were similar to journals, with the additional purpose that they would serve as the seedbeds for topics to be developed and crafted into texts for readers. Explicitly, the teacher discussed them as tools for thinking, as "a place to work out whatever's in your mind or going on in the world around you."

The teacher in this classroom was experienced and considered expert in writing generally and the use of writing workshop particularly. She was often called upon to conduct professional development for other teachers, in this district and outside it. In every classroom, a teacher works with students to create a discourse, a way "we" talk to ourselves as a group, and that discourse expresses the explicit values of the community, the sense of what counts (Green & Dixon, 1994; Lemke, 2000). The discourse this teacher brokered into the classroom contained themes pertaining to the relationships among members of the class. She often stated to researchers and children that she valued children's independence, and just as often, she articulated values of community and caring. The school year began with the whole school having chosen as a theme "what a wonderful world," which was deliberately broad enough to permit much diversity among different classes and grade levels. The teacher in this study chose to emphasize making the world *better*, rather than how wonderful it already was, and there were many conversations across the curriculum about actions individuals could take to improve the natural and social world. Only one rule was posted in the classroom, "Be a good friend," because the teacher thought that if the class had enough conversations about that one rule, almost every other norm would stem from it. Care for the physical space, respect for one another, supportive talk about others' work, and listening—these themes and others were tied back to the central constitutional norm of the room.

Two children are represented in the data episode we detail in this article, though we followed a total of six focal children. We chose focal children with several principles in mind. We were interested in children whose voices were less often present in the official settings in the classroom. Many of these same children had also been identified for Reading Recovery and tended to write texts with few words, so they might be described as more academically vulnerable than the others. If positioning matters, it would seem to matter most to such children.

Romy was a first grader. Tiny, with long, straight, black hair and huge, perplexed eyes, Romy was academically unconfident and often stood back from the class's activity. She came from a working-class European American family that moved three times during the school year. The teacher and principal reported to us that the moves were due to the family's financial instability as well as a sequence of parental separations. On several occasions when we observed Romy,

she mentioned to other children how no one listened to her and that no one was nice to her. She filled the pages of her notebook with drawings and simple, repetitive writing about friends, feelings, and family. The teacher and other students mostly thought of her as a struggler, and she was in the school's Reading Recovery program. The teacher noted that Romy did not ask for attention as often as most young children do and, in that sense, seemed independent, keeping in touch with the teacher via frequent little notes ("Im sorry I was late") left here and there. Though she often appeared to get little writing done during writing workshop, the teacher had a large collection of Romy's unofficial, socially purposed writing.

Jessamyn was a second grader who was smaller than most of the children her age. She was of Filipino ancestry, and her hands, feet, and legs were scarred and partially developed, a result of a disease in infancy. Her mother, the only adult in the household, worked as a secretarial assistant in a local business and sometimes, according to the teacher and principal, showed signs of financial hardship. Jessamyn was slow to socialize when she entered school and spent much of her kindergarten year silent. She had gradually become more outgoing during her first-grade year in this classroom and even more so in second-grade, bidding to answer questions and share during morning class meetings. Literacy learning had not begun easily for her, and she had been in Reading Recovery in first grade. Despite her own academic and literacy difficulties, she often took on a teacher air as she coached children she saw as less competent, shaking her head in exasperation when others would not do what she told them.

Data Collection

Since social positions exist as functions of discourses, it was necessary to nest our observations of positioning within the larger discursive context of classroom life. We needed to understand themes in the discourse as well as the participation structures that invited interaction among students. Table 1 shows the early and late phases of our data collection, the types of data we collected, and the function of those data in the study. In our first stage of data collection, from September to December of 2000, our participant observation saw us visiting approximately once per week, for an hour and a half to two hours, to observe and assist children during their morning meeting, writing workshop, sustained silent reading, and snack. We wrote field notes during these visits, which we typed immediately upon leaving the school. On four occasions, we also videotaped whole-class and small-group interactions. In this early contextualizing phase, our investigation concerned the ways people in this community participated together in the activity of learning to write, what literacy meant to the natives of this microculture, and what participation structures were afforded to individuals.

In reviewing these initial data, we noticed that during writing time, particular pairs or small groups of writers often sat together every day for a stretch of several weeks. These writing partnerships were voluntary and improvisational, neither

TABLE 1: Data Sources

Phase	Data	Function of data
Early September through December 2000	Fieldnotes from 15-20 hours of weekly participant observation	Establishing the nature of writing and learning in this classroom
	Videotape of selected portions of classroom visits (4)—mini-lesson, conferences, peer interactions, sharing time	Examination of participation structures and signals of competence
	Interviews with teacher (10)	Exploration of the discourse of literacy in this classroom
	Interviews with principal (2)	Development of larger context and extended discursive resources
Late January through April 2001	Fieldnotes from 20-24 hours of weekly non-participant observation of writing partners	Examination of relational and cognitive dimensions of student talk while writing
	Interviews with teacher (10)	Analysis of the affordances in this classroom's discourse
	Interviews with principal (2)	Background on focal students

assigned nor publicly remarked upon by the teacher. Furthermore, they did not exactly correspond with friendship pairings on the playground or with the children's chosen partners in other parts of the school day. The structures were unofficial, and the talk in them did not conform to the official share and conference genres of the classroom. However, talk in this context comprised the majority of utterances for any individual child in the community, as this was how they spent the most time. Wondering about the kinds of relational work that might occur there and about the repertoires of social positioning that might be available, we spent our second phase of data collection, from January through April, observing selected writing partners. Though we present only one dyad here, we observed a total of six children, working usually in pairs and sometimes in groups of three or four. This grouping was always the children's decision, not an assignment by the teacher or us.

With the notion of positioning in mind, we took special care in considering the most appropriate means of recording our observations, mindful of the extent to which researchers position their informants as they collect data (Ritchie & Rigano, 2001). Since we wanted to capture relational, positional acts, Labov's "observer's paradox"—that is, the paradox of wanting to observe the way people use language when they are not observed (Labov, 1972)—was particularly pointed. The presence of an adult affects the interactions of children, but not all adult presences have the same effects. The teacher's presence, for instance, positions children more firmly within the teacher's discourse and school relationships. Var-

ied technologies introduce different sets of “others” into a setting, and electronic technologies can create a sense of surveillance by unidentified others, as “the tape recorder introduces possible subsequent audiences into consideration” (Bauman & Briggs, 1990, p. 71). We were especially concerned that video cameras or microphones could introduce the teacher’s presence into the children’s relatively intimate interactions (since she undoubtedly would be viewing or listening to the recordings). As researchers, we had been in the classroom all year, writing incessantly, and had brought in pre-service students and other visitors as well. The children were fairly accustomed to adults sitting near them, taking notes. While audiorecordings would have allowed us the ability to transcribe precise wording, overlaps, interruptions, and other details of speech, we judged that kind of precision as less significant for our level of analysis than being as careful as possible about our procedures’ influences on social positioning. We therefore assigned a trial period during which we sat near, but not too near, the children, and attempted to capture on the fly as much talk as possible. We found that the conversation was not as rapid as it might be, for example, on the playground. Since the children were writing as they talked, they often would say something, pause to write, and then the other child would answer. After this trial period, we were confident that though we might miss a word here or there, we were not missing significant social moves, which were to be our units of analysis. Immediately after leaving each visit to the site, we went over our fieldnotes, filling in some of the physical actions that accompanied utterances. The use of fieldnotes or reconstructions to examine positional moves has precedence in the work of Davies and Harré (1990) and Holland et al. (1998). Our fieldnotes are not reconstructions, and they are not completely certain, real, and objective. Then again, we couldn’t make such claims about transcripts either (Green, Franquiz & Dixon, 1997; Mishler, 1991), particularly if the taping device left the children sensing the omnipresence of a normative adult eye.

We provided the teacher with a copy of field notes and memos following each classroom visit (though the children were not aware of this). We discussed whether the children’s words and actions as we had described them corresponded with her experience of the children. In March, May, and June of 2001, we conducted one-hour interviews with the teacher in order to verify and clarify our ongoing understandings of the children and their relationships. These interviews represent only a few of our talks with the teacher, since we engaged in almost daily conversations with her about classroom events and significant literacy moments. This collaboration enriched our understanding of classroom dynamics, student backgrounds, students’ relationships in other contexts, classroom purposes and discourses, and the larger institutional and political context of this classroom. The school principal also participated in a study group with us, which provided an opportunity to

discuss certain school and community issues, discourses, and values. In this late stage of data collection, we finished collecting student writing samples. Entries from their writers' notebooks and other written artifacts served to augment our field notes and to align our notes with children's written texts. These supplemental data, collected during this stage, helped us piece together a developmental picture of the students' writing lives across time and of the contexts in which they spent their days.

Data Analysis

We used constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) from early in our participant observation to formulate categories such as the following: asking for peer help with writing, getting a voice in the room, helping with tools, teacher intervening in social interactions, elder/younger relationships, and genre conversations. From the observational data, we also developed initial categories describing writers' actions as they moved in and out of each other's texts: drawing you into my text, intruding into your text, alerting you to your presence in my text, planning my text, using a text to position you, crediting peers, and achievement talk. Further analysis developed the notion that writing was mediating relationships and that relationships were mediating the writing process. This analysis raised the issue of the importance of social positioning.

In order to explore the relationship of writing activity to positioning, we selected four episodes (each an entire session in writing workshop) that featured Romy, Jessamyn, Ally, and Liz. We chose these girls because of the stability of their groups and also because Romy and Jessamyn in particular were evidently vulnerable to difficulty in acquiring literacy. These episodes contained instances of almost all of the codes we had at that point established. They were, furthermore, sufficiently long and complex to warrant closer readings. We conducted microanalyses (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Green & Wallat, 1981; McDermott, Gospodinoff & Aron, 1978; Putney, Green, Dixon, Durán & Yeager, 2000; Solsken, Willett & Wilson-Keenan, 2000) of these four episodes in order to discipline our attention to the positioning moves. The ethnographic software program QSR NUD*IST helped us code along multiple dimensions and clarify the relationships among these dimensions. Our microanalysis was a close reading of written data, broken into message units, along categories assigned to the following analytic dimensions: action, agent, utterance, body language, text function, self-positioning, other-positioning, speech genre, storyline, and discursive resources. Appendix A shows a chart representing the style of microanalysis we undertook. In Appendix B we catalogue some examples of the terms by which we identified speech genres, actions, text function, self-positioning, other-positioning, storylines, and discursive resources. We discuss these below.

Analytic Categories for Positioning

REFLEXIVE AND INTERACTIVE POSITIONING. In our overall analysis of students' utterances, reflexive positioning (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999), wherein a person positioned herself, was always accompanied by interactive positioning (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999), wherein she positioned the other person by treating her as a particular type of interlocutor in relation to her own position. In other words, *taking* a position always meant *assigning* a position simultaneously and in the same action. If I am the mother, you are the child; if I am the teacher, you are the student; if I am the monitor, you are the observed. Your position is a consequence of mine; or vice versa. Positions occurred, as van Langenhove and Harré theorize, in *I/You* pairings (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). These pairings could be interpreted as involving relative privilege, or higher/lower status, but it was also possible to see them as inflected by more variation than a simple power gradient, as the variety of "characters" we found reveals. Furthermore, people sometimes positioned themselves as vulnerable or subjugated themselves to the other person, so the pursuit of an agent's interests was not identical with taking a dominant or privileged position. As we shall see in our example, the assumed positional pairings did assert a structure of who could say and do particular things, who could feel certain ways, or who could make particular identity claims.

TEXT FUNCTION. When students' talk or actions referred to their texts, the text itself was also assigned a function as part of the total social setting being composed. At times, the text was evidence—a verification for the claims I am making about you. Other times, the text was a work focus, i.e., something I could use to dissociate from or ignore you; or a location of need, i.e., something with which I require you to help me. Texts therefore mediated relations among those present in the writing situation as much as they mediated author/audience or subject/meaning relations. Texts are not human subjects, and so they cannot, strictly speaking, take on or assign subject positions. However, they can be enlisted into social functions by an agent in an act of positioning, and in that way, texts may be seen as positioned in a particular storyline.

POSITIONING GENRES. We use the verb forms "position" and "positioning" often here; however, in our data, children employed multiple speech genres that we include under an umbrella of "positioning." These positioning genres included representations of behavior ("you are doing x"), assignments of roles ("you be x"), attributions of agency ("you meant to x"), attitudes (little content other than emotional expression), direct domination/subjugation moves, and actual interactions (acting as if x were the case without commenting upon it). Furthermore, an interlocutor must either acquiesce to the other's positioning or resist actively, or else must employ a *non sequitur* to adopt a different storyline. Genres of positioning change as rapidly as the positions themselves. However, the verb "to position,"

rather than “to subjugate” or “to attitudinize,” keeps the agentive, strategic nature of this language use explicitly connected to the ongoing construction of selves.

STORYLINES. For our entire data corpus, our categories were more stable in describing positions for self ($n=23$), other ($n=17$), and text ($n=8$) than were our categories for storyline ($n=124$). We could often assign existing codes to self-positions, even more often to other-positions, and still more often to text functions. Storylines, however, seemed much more often to demand new codes. This suggests that the relationship between position and storyline is not one of simple embeddedness, where every position is situated in a particular storyline, as is suggested in van Langenhove and Harré (1999). Rather, positions are more like stock characters who appear in many different storylines, like characters in *commedias dell’arte*, or like the masks writers must don in Ong’s (1975) metaphor. The pivot point between a discursive resource and a storyline is the position. Storylines provide coherence to the triadic *I-you-text* positions. A position may come before a storyline, but the storyline is what creates the relations among self, other, and text.

DISCURSIVE RESOURCES. Positions and storylines are situated in discourses, but we found with these young children that the discourse of the classroom was not the primary source from which the positions were drawn. Relevant discursive resources were more often home relations, playground/friend/sibling contexts, popular culture, and even the language of adult work contexts that the children would have access to through interactions with parents and through popular culture. School culture, in general, especially the language of achievement—being better or worse on the ladder of literacy—was also more common than the particular discourse of this classroom, which tended to express difference in lateral terms, rather than hierarchical ones. Therefore, to assign a category of discursive resource to an action, we had to work outward from the present material instant, into other linguistic contexts in which this language might occur.

Wertsch’s question, derived from Bakhtin, “who is doing the talking?” (Wertsch, 1991, p. 63) was relevant to our assignment of cultural resources. Wertsch is referring to Bakhtin’s notion of “social languages” (Bakhtin, 1981), the discourses of particular social groups that are always invoked whenever anyone produces an utterance. In most uses of this concept, the social languages are very large—the discourse of medicine, for example. Here, in examining the language of young children so early in their lives as users of literacy, the discursive resources, these wellsprings of utterances, are still social languages, but many of these languages are instantiated in local, everyday, domestic contexts. With feminist scholars (e.g., Hollway, 1984; Smith, 1990), we assert—and we believe our analysis demonstrates—that these intimate contexts are no less powerful for their smallness and locality. Indeed, they are primary sources for language and positioning, and they set individual persons on identity trajectories. When we identify the resource from

which the children appear to draw their positioning moves, we are working, in part, with the question, “who is doing the talking?”

It is important to note that, in identifying discursive resources, we were not making claims about the autobiography of individual children. We were not with them when they appropriated the relevant language and could never exclude possibilities other than those we assigned. However, as we are competent members of the culture, it is possible for us to identify the locations in which Bakhtinian social languages occur. (We both grew up in working class, white, English-speaking families in the United States.) If a mother/unruly child storyline really came from the child’s experience with an aunt or a teacher, this does not negate the legitimacy of our provisional title for a common cultural form, because our description is of the language in use, not of individuals’ biographies. Further ambiguity is introduced into this interpretive process by the fact that discursive repertoires are not pure but are overlapping. Bossiness in an interaction may have been appropriated from actual boss/bossed relations, but may be secondarily inflected by the uses of similar relational formations on playgrounds and in other peer play contexts.

Researchers’ Roles

We played different roles in the research process. Early in the year, we both spent significant time in the classroom. Randy observed and videotaped, and Tasha assisted the teacher, conferred with children, and took field notes. Both interacted with the children in teacher-like ways, though the children were always clear that the teacher had a level of authority that neither of us possessed. As time went on, we stood back more and tried to shift our role from teacher’s helper to observer. Of course, it is possible that when we were around, the students censored themselves in ways they might have done had the teacher been sitting there. It is difficult, however, for us to see how this is so when we examine the data, since it appears that the children were willing to say plenty of things of which the teacher would have disapproved. It was Tasha who did most of the observing of the dyads and recorded the episode we analyze below. We did the initial coding together, though Randy did much revising of the categories after that, along with developing the theoretical perspective. We had frequent conversations as the codes changed from more text-centered ones (as mentioned above) to ones more informed by a theory of positioning within discursive resources.

Romy and Jessamyn during Writing Workshop: An Episode of Writers’ Talk

For this article, we have chosen one episode, representing the conversation in an entire writing workshop for Romy and Jessamyn, who were sitting together that day. The selection of a single, entire episode, rather than shorter glimpses into interactions, affords the best possible access to the character of these interactions.

Brief snippets of talk, like those, for example, in Daiute and Dalton (1993), are often difficult to see as positioning because one needs more interactional context to ascertain what people are doing with one another. We selected this scene as a telling case (Putney et al., 2000) in that it contained, more than any other single episode in our corpus, opportunities to discuss the insights this research yielded. It is an extended sample in which most of the utterances come from just two children, and therefore the positional moves could be traced more clearly than would be the case with more speaking participants (that is, one questions less often who is being addressed by a particular utterance). Moreover, on the day in which this scene took place, the nearness of a deadline and publication event made writing itself more central to the conversation than was often the case. In what follows, we represent the scene in narrative, rather than as a transcript, in order to differentiate this fieldnote data from a transcription of a tape. We present the scene broken into three sub-units, between which we offer analytic remarks.

Beginning Writing Time: Being Done and Almost Super-Done

Romy has finished her picture book and is writing in her notebook, beginning with the date. "I messed up my 2," she says. "I messed up again."

She refers to the pages in Jessamyn's picture book. "You got two more to color?" "Yeah," Jessamyn replies.

Romy finishes her date. "There! That's better." She draws a girl with a frown. "Read my story when I'm done."

Jessamyn keeps working on her pages.

"How do you spell bird?" Romy asks, again getting no answer from Jessamyn. Romy points to the entry in her own notebook. "Is this a round D?" Jessamyn does not reply. "Are you done?" Romy asks.

"I'm almost SUPER-done," says Jessamyn. "I gotta trace this, and then I'm done."

Looking at Jessamyn's picture, Romy says, "You don't color with black marker that way."

Suddenly Liz, who is sitting at the next table, turns to Romy and says, "You're making fun."

"No I'm not!" Romy says. She turns to Jessamyn. "I didn't make fun of you, did I?"

"Sort of," Jessamyn replies.

"Oh, God," Romy says, under her breath.

Jessamyn says, "When you say God..."

"You say it out loud, Jessamyn," Romy answers.

Going on with her thought, Jessamyn says, "That means he thinks you're talking to him."

Both children are writing as they talk. Romy asks, "How can that be?"

"He thinks you're praying," Jessamyn replies.

"Whatever!" says Romy, with exasperation.

Jessamyn mutters something we cannot hear, then Romy replies, "Who will make me, you or God?"

"Never mind," says Jessamyn.

"Never mind back to you!" answers Romy.

Our analysis here will trace the reflexive (self) and interactive (other) positioning in this section of the scene. Our concern is to show the relational work underway between Romy and Jessamyn and how that relational work is relevant to their writing work. To do so, we must examine their talk in this scene against the background of the ethnographic data about the classroom, the school, and the world outside of school.

In the official discourse of this classroom, there is no glory in finishing earlier than anyone else. Writing time happens every day, and if a student finishes with one piece of writing, she starts a new one or writes in her writer's notebook. Still, as we shall see throughout this episode, Romy's being finished allows her to position herself as speedy and accomplished, and Jessamyn as perhaps a tad slow, disorganized, or problematic. In a few days, the class will have a writing "celebration," an evening publication event that will be attended by parents, administrators, and other adults, and the children will read their picture books aloud and display them around the classroom for public inspection. Much of the scene is fueled by this reality, especially since one of the actors is finished and one is not. Romy asks twice in a very few minutes about Jessamyn's progress. Jessamyn's final comment that she is almost—not just done, but SUPER-done—reiterates the teleology toward done-ness.

At the same time, Romy seems uncomfortable with her advantage. In most episodes, she is positioned, by others as well as herself, as younger, less capable, and socially inept, a positioning she rarely resists. She begins the episode with a completely unnecessary declaration that she has "messed up" a numeral in dating her notebook entry, positioning herself as inept and a source of frustration to herself. There is, in this classroom's official discourse, no call for her to confess to making a mistake; in fact, this comment is nearly transgressive of an official theme that mistakes are a part of learning. Then, in asking Jessamyn if she will read the entry when she finishes, Romy positions Jessamyn as audience and therefore someone who is to be pleased. She also positions Jessamyn as a more knowledgeable other by asking for a spelling and then about letter formation. Though these positions would privilege her, Jessamyn does not accept either of them, but rather keeps working, assuming a position of the serious and diligent adult, and therefore positioning Romy as the annoying, pestering child.

This may strike some readers as an unfair or at least arguable characterization of Jessamyn just getting on with her work. We should point out, though, that we

are not trying to ascribe intentions or inner states to subjects, rather to interpret social meanings of their actions. Positions are not always consciously adopted, and they belong structurally to discourses, like grammar belongs to a sentence (Hollway, 1984). Interpreting acts of positioning, therefore, involves not mind-reading, but recognizing intertextually the positions that may be seen in other settings as well, through participation in a culture similar to that of the observed subjects. (One could not interpret the positional moves of subjects in a culture or a discourse with which one was unfamiliar.) So our characterization of Jessamyn as positioning herself as busy adult and Romy as pestering child is simply a reading of a type of social relation that is produced in this interaction, not an attribution of motive to Jessamyn.

At the beginning of this section, Romy's positioning is somewhat ambivalent—a little bit of dominance over Jessamyn, a little bit of subjugation. Later, however, we see a much more rapid exchange of attempts to create self and other that detaches from its original impetus in the writing event and takes on a life of its own. In commenting about the black marker, Romy initiates again, positioning herself as teacher or more experienced student, the keeper of the rules, or the superior artist with insight into the use of media. Jessamyn is correspondingly positioned as the student in need of advice or correction. Immediately, Liz, who is not even seated at the same table, intrudes to reposition both Romy and Jessamyn—Romy as socially inept, a bad friend, someone who does not even know how to be nice, and Jessamyn as victim. Liz's utterance is an instance of second order, accountive positioning (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999), because it is talk about talk, an opposition to and comment upon Romy's previous speech. Romy not only resists, but also attempts to reinscribe her solidarity with Jessamyn against Liz, positioning Jessamyn as friend inside the friend bubble and Liz as interloper. Jessamyn bursts this bubble by siding with Liz—but not completely, and with enough of a hedge in saying "sort of" to appear even-handed. In her cursing sigh, Romy is the exasperated parent and these other two the kids who just will not give her any peace.

In taking up a theological perspective, Jessamyn turns into the good mother who must explain to a morally naive child why one must not take the Lord's name in vain. Romy offers a classic ethical resistance by positioning Jessamyn as hypocritical, thereby claiming a higher, more sincere ethical territory, and then, by becoming confused about what Jessamyn is trying to say, positioning her as nonsensical: at best, hair-splitting, and at worst, mad. Though we do not have the words of Jessamyn's next utterance, we can infer the positioning from the context and perlocutionary force (Austin, 1962): she has claimed an authoritative word on how Romy must behave henceforward, which of course places Romy well beneath her. Romy rejects Jessamyn's authority by making it clear enough that, even if God has the power to control what she does, Jessamyn does not. Their dueling "never

minds" are tit-for-tat rejections of the possibility that the other will ever be able to comprehend what each is trying to say. Each is positioning the other as being beyond hope of communication, unreachable by language.

As we have pointed out, positions are produced by and within discourses (Hollway, 1984); however, the local discourse of this classroom did not produce all the positions we have seen so far. In fact, the voice of the individual teacher in this classroom is not ventriloquated (Wertsch, 1991) in any of the children's utterances in this section. The discourses that function as resources in this exchange derive partly from the formal institution of school and partly from more informal contexts that nevertheless carry themes in the culture. The various mother-child constellations are drawn from typified interactions in families—familiar interactions, that is. The sibling/playground relations of competition and dominance/subjugation may be brokered through family life or through other peer relations that occur when children are away from adults. Other, less direct resources include popular culture, wherein children have access to many adult positions and attitudes, and the reported and enacted experience of their parents in adult relations and contexts. Romy's "oh god" and Jessamyn's later muttered threat are words, meanings, and intentions imported from contexts that were not made especially for children.

Though we are highlighting positioning as a form of social action, we also analyzed the ways positioning occurs within particular speech genres. Very common in this episode are *representations of behavior* (n=32), where one subjectivity characterizes in language her own or someone else's activity, saying "you/I do X." Romy's first utterance about messing up and Liz's utterance about Romy making fun are examples. In naming actions in this way, a person invokes a storyline as well as positions, making an explicit claim for the relations between who you are, who I am, and what is going on between us. Other representations not present in this particular episode, though present in others we analyzed, are *representations of individuals* ("I am/you are X"), and *representations of relations* ("we have X sort of relationship"). In this episode, it is the naming of action, not the person or the relationship, that sets a positional context. Another positioning genre that occurs frequently (n=31) in this episode is a relatively straightforward interaction, *acting as if*, that is going ahead with the assumption that the positional assertion is really the case. We used this code, for example, when Jessamyn did not reply to Romy but just ignored her and kept working. Other utterances, such as Romy's "oh god" and their "never mind" statements, carry little in the way of literal meaning, but rather convey attitudes that shift the interaction meaning and positions in the chain of utterances. We called these *attitudes*, and we coded them 16 times in this episode. *Assignment of action role* (n=9) refers to an utterance in which one person says to the other "now you do/be X," prescribing the next turn for the partner. Romy does this later in insisting that Jessamyn check her drawing. In *dominating/*

subjugating, the utterance functions primarily to assert a power relation ($n=13$), as when Romy tells Jessamyn not to color with black marker (domination) or when she asks if this is “a round D” (subjugation). We took these to be direct, explicit bossiness or directly, explicitly assuming a weaker position. *Attributions of agency* ($n=4$) were utterances in which a subject’s intentions and the interactional nature of their actions were represented, as in “you meant to do X.” Romy’s statement that she did not know Jessamyn was kidding is an example of an attribution of agency, since it could be translated as “I thought you meant to hurt me.” So, though every utterance assumes positionalities for self/other/text, functional descriptions of the language may be diverse in naming multiple possible speech genres.

In the Midst: Problems with Pages and other Missing Things

Jessamyn goes across the room to another table, where a boy is using her marker. Romy writes by herself, drawing what looks like an egg with petals growing out of it.

Jessamyn returns to the table but is standing up, and Romy looks up at her. “Done?” she asks.

“I gotta put it in order,” says Jessamyn, looking for some pages she is missing from her picture book. She goes to the table where the teacher is sitting and looks at other students’ pictures. She goes to get her writing folder from the file box where they are kept.

Romy calls out to Jessamyn. “Jessamyn, what are you looking for?”

Jessamyn brings her writing folder to the table and sits down next to Romy, who asks, “What are you doing?”

“This is way back,” Jessamyn says, looking at work in her folder from the previous school year. “It’s 1999.”

Pointing to one of Jessamyn’s papers, Romy asks, “What does this say?”

“About [the teacher],” Jessamyn replies.

“What?” asks Romy.

“I was writing a book about [the teacher],” Jessamyn replies, in an aggravated tone.

Romy, apparently insulted by Jessamyn’s tone, says, “Gosh!” She goes to sharpen her pencil over by the sink.

Romy returns and shows Jessamyn her pencil tip. “Look!” Jessamyn does not answer. She leaves to search her cubby for her missing book pages.

“Found ’em!” she announces, returning. Sitting back down at the table, she sorts through her pages to put them in order.

“Good,” Romy answers.

Pointing to her own drawing, Romy says, “See any more yellow spots like on the tail? Check and see if I missed a spot.”

Jessamyn does not reply or look up, but rather keeps flipping through the pages of her book. "I messed up again!" Romy says.

"Just look and see if I missed a spot," says Romy. She pauses. "Just look and see if I missed a spot!" Another waiting pause. "Just look and see if I missed a spot and then I'll draw!" Finally, sounding annoyed, she says, "Never mind, I got it. Done!" She flips to the next clean page of her notebook. "Next page. I'm going to write a lot. Oh my! Be right back!"

Through all of this, Jessamyn is still sorting pages, not responding to Romy. Romy goes again to the pencil sharpener.

Returning and pointing to a page in Jessamyn's picture book, Romy asks, "What does that say?"

Jessamyn replies indignantly, "I'm going to get Jerold."

Romy, pointing to a page in Jessamyn's book says, "You didn't put any chairs?"

"Yes I did!" Jessamyn protests.

"Whatever!" says Romy, sounding disgusted. "You don't know what I'm talking about."

Jessamyn picks up her book and slams it on the table. "Never mind!"

"Never mind you back!" says Romy.

This section begins with Romy again positioning Jessamyn as the one who has not caught up. Jessamyn starts out again ignoring Romy, thereby positioning her as the child saying "are we there yet" and herself as the busy, distracted, but serious adult. But she has a crisis on her hands. She has finished writing and illustrating her picture book, and the pages she has made are not where she thinks they should be. She is neither panicked nor grief-stricken yet, but, rather, in the early-lost stage of considering the possibilities, moving categorically through the places the pages could be: her folder, at the table where the teacher is sitting, among other children's pages, in her cubby. She has something to do, but, unlike Romy at the very beginning of this episode, she does not for a minute position herself as having difficulty, taking on the competent and serious persona throughout, made even more so by her ignoring of Romy's impertinent demands to know what is going on. Romy's call across the room is, of course, a public positioning, staging Jessamyn to the class and the teacher as someone who has lost something, a subjectivity Jessamyn is pointedly concealing publicly.

In this section, we want to pay particular attention to the way text is positioned, because doing so will permit us to situate academic or cognitive work within a social or relational matrix. When Jessamyn has lost a page, the text is, for Romy, evidence that something has gone wrong for Jessamyn. For Jessamyn, it is a problem to be solved, a resistant material object that will not cooperate with her intention to make something and therefore achieve something. We will continue to underscore the positioning of text through the rest of this portion of the episode.

Jessamyn reinforces her busy adult position until Romy attempts to undercut it by being unable to read something Jessamyn has written because of its invented spelling. This is the first time in this episode that “I can’t read it” positions the other as someone who cannot write and the text explicitly as evidence of incompetence with meaning. Even when Jessamyn perfunctorily states the topic, Romy presses the issue, with her “what?” Jessamyn registers annoyance not only because she has been distracted from the more urgent work of looking for her missing pages; she is also responding to being positioned, right in the middle of this mini-crisis, as an incompetent writer with questionable sense and intentions. When Jessamyn says that a text is “way back,” she refers in part to the fact that she wrote it early in the previous school year, about eighteen months past. In the life of a seven-year-old early in her literate career, this page is evidence that she was once much different as a writer. The relative permanence of the written text in a portfolio (which makes assessment possible) in this case makes her vulnerable to being positioned as less capable, and Romy bears down precisely upon that vulnerability. The fact that Jessamyn happens to be paging through her folder, looking for her lost page, positions the text on which Romy has incidentally fixed her attention as completely beside the point.

Romy’s exclamation of “gosh” positions Jessamyn as an overreacting, socially unskillful, bad friend, and herself as someone engaged in blamelessly sincere interests. These positions are by nature transitory and constantly shifting, though, not roles that are taken on for a person’s entire participation in a community, or even for a whole scene (Davies & Harré, 1990). By the time Romy gets back from the pencil sharpener, she is ready to be someone sharing appreciation of a tool. The restoration of the two friends to the same side of things is sounded again in Jessamyn’s announcement that she found her pages, thereby positioning herself as open to sharing her fortunes with Romy, and Romy as someone who is interested. The pages, previously lost and now found, have been transformed from evidence of incompetence to evidence of having been sufficiently organized all along.

Romy returns to the position of a writer in need of help—positioning Jessamyn as a more capable other, perhaps a mother—in asking Jessamyn to see if she missed coloring in any yellow spots on her drawing. The text here is an invitation, with inadequacies planted for Jessamyn to find, in order to draw her nearer to Romy in interaction. Jessamyn’s statement that she messed up again is unusual in this scene, in that it is the sort of thing that Romy more often says. It positions her and Romy, therefore, more as peers than she does through the rest of the scene, and implicates text as a shared problem. In spite of that shift, Jessamyn’s subsequent refusal to answer Romy leaves Romy in the position of pestering child, a position she readily enacts as she repeats her request for help. Romy has put herself out on a limb, inviting Jessamyn into her text more directly than she has at any other time in the episode, and that is why it is hard for her to let go of the request; she can

only exit that position by repositioning herself and Jessamyn, writing a new story of this moment.

Romy has positioned her text as the place she and Jessamyn can be together, a sort of clubhouse. If Jessamyn will not come in, then the text, Romy, and Jessamyn have to become something else. Romy, in this “never mind, I got it,” repositions the text as an object of private ownership, herself as independent worker, and Jessamyn as incorrigibly unhelpful. Having reclaimed private ownership of her text, she then steps into an achievement mentality, firmly on the metaphoric ladder of literacy development, convinced of the quality of quantity in writing, as she announces her intention to write a lot. Again, though, her saying this is social action, not necessarily expression of internal states. She is announcing her productivity, her turning of pages, *to Jessamyn*, in order to position herself as powerful on her own—especially compared to the hapless Jessamyn, who cannot even get her pages straight. Even the action of sharpening a pencil is a signification to Jessamyn of her position of confident determination; by the sharpening of the pencil, Jessamyn, who is not even using a pencil right now, is positioned as inept.

As Romy returns from this errand, she revisits her earlier strategy of intruding into Jessamyn’s text and positioning Jessamyn as inadequate because her writing is not comprehensible. Never mind the question of how much skill Jessamyn actually “has”: if Romy cannot read what Jessamyn has written, it could as easily be because of Romy’s reading ability as Jessamyn’s writing ability. The comment is not an expression about skill, but rather a use of text and the cultural discourse of skill to position Jessamyn and herself in relation to one another. Her comment is as critical as that of an adult in a writing group beginning with “I’m confused. . . .” Jessamyn accepts her victimized position, of someone needing help, by threatening to get Jerold, who, it must be pointed out, is a very unthreatening little boy. In needing to make a threat, Jessamyn reinforces Romy’s current position of aggressor and oppressor. Romy’s question about where the chairs are in Jessamyn’s illustration again positions herself as knowledgeable about illustrations and chairs and their relationships to each other, and Jessamyn as less capable. This time, Jessamyn replies more directly, challenging Romy’s ability to see and understand what is already on the page. Here, she has a claim to justice, and can assume the position of wrongfully accused and position Romy as unfair evaluator. In doing so, she reclaims dominion over her text and manages to pry the other girl out of it. Romy responds by obfuscating, accountively positioning herself as working with meanings that are beyond Jessamyn’s comprehension. In the “never minds” that follow, each girl positions the other as being an impossible partner of communication.

The texts in this data episode (as in all the others in our corpus) were artifacts of this classroom discourse and practice vis-à-vis writing. Romy is writing in a writer’s notebook, and Jessamyn is working on a picture book within a writing-

based genre study. The nature, structure, relations, and uses of those texts are constructed and constrained by the local discourse of literacy. But the social functions to which the text is assigned in the interactions examined here are not all artifacts of the official discourse of this classroom community. The girls position their texts not simply as communicative or aesthetic devices. Rather, the texts are, in shifting ways, evidence about the subjectivities assumed by the girls. These text positionings are accomplished along the horizon of joint activity of the speaker, who in language asserts something about the text; and the interlocutor, who either rejects that position for the text or appropriates the new terms of the discussion, treating the text as if it is in fact what the speaker asserted it to be. However, some of the text functions are affordances of the discourse of this classroom. Jessamyn's positioning of her book as a focus of work is a function of the classroom's theme of productivity, and Romy's positioning of text as a meeting place is consonant with the class' discourse of writing being for real audiences. Like the girls themselves, the text occupies a hybrid space (Gutiérrez & Stone, 2000), one neither completely official nor completely unofficial.

Acts of text-positioning interact here with the nature of print as a technology. Jessamyn's text functions as evidence of her lack of studenting capability, because pages, unlike speech or electronic data, have to be located materially in some physical place. Unlike more transitory, time-bound technologies such as speech, print tends to stay put, which permits the "way back" text to be positioned as evidence of Jessamyn's literacy being only emergent. The most obvious text functions in all our data tend to be evidence of being either more or less capable. However, text can also be a potential meeting place, or a space in which one can hold the names of people in mind—as in Jessamyn's text about the teacher and in Romy's text in the next section. In this school setting, texts are boundary objects (Star & Griesemer, 1989) between the official world, where one is expected to get better at particular sanctioned practices, and the unofficial world, where one loves, worships, talks about, and competes with certain people. Texts' positions in hybrid social negotiations sometimes tip toward one side of that boundary or the other.

Finishing Up: Speed, Spelling, and Love

After a little while, Romy speaks again, pointing to a word in her notebook.

"What does that say?" She has written in her notebook K-I-a-y.

"I don't want to do that right now," says Jessamyn. She then starts writing on her hand with a thin, gold marker.

"What does it say?" asks Romy.

"I was going to say I love my mom," Jessamyn says.

"I'm telling on you, because you're not supposed to do that," Romy says.

"It's my pen!" says Jessamyn. She then gets up and takes her book to the teacher. She and the teacher confer about her writing, while Romy keeps writing and drawing. Jessamyn comes back. "I'm almost done. I just got one more!"

"Next page!," says Romy. "I'm getting a lot of pages!"

Jessamyn, in a snotty voice, says, "A bunch of pages about the same thing."

Jessamyn seems to want to retract the insult as soon as it is out of her mouth. "I was just kidding," she says.

"I didn't know you were just playing around," says Romy. Then, "There!" She puts her arm around her writing, so that Jessamyn can't see what she is writing. "Don't look at this. It's going to be your Valentine."

"I already know what it looks like," Jessamyn says.

"You don't know what the words are going to say," says Romy. She is trying to write Jessamyn's name. "Is that how you spell it? Wait! Don't look!" She cups a hand around her words to prevent Jessamyn from seeing any more of the message. "How do you spell your name?"

"J..."

"Got it."

Jessamyn goes on spelling her name, with Romy, saying, "Got it" after each letter. Romy then says, "You can look! Don't look!" She makes one more mark on the page. "Okay you can look now!"

Now, Romy uses the same words about her own text that she did previously regarding Jessamyn's, asking "what does that say?" In doing so, she positions herself as at least a year younger in her literacy development than she actually is, as so inexperienced with print that she will write random letters and then ask a more knowledgeable other what they "say." She has finished writing a picture book, and it reveals that she is in control of many writing conventions, but she behaves now as if she is incapable of making words on purpose. Romy is younger than Jessamyn, but here she exaggerates their developmental difference in an effort to restore solidarity. She subjugates herself to Jessamyn.

We want to give special attention to the storylines invoked by positions in this section. Storylines provide coherence between the positions assigned to self, other, and text, so they are of special value in our overall project of examining the intertwining of cognitive and socio-emotional dimensions of learning to be a writer. Here, Romy employs a storyline of mother and child, playing a sort of "watch me" game, where the child performs an action and then asks the parent "what did I do?" In contemporary U.S. culture, this type of paper- and crayon-interaction pattern occurs most typically with pre-school-aged children and their parents. Like many parents, Jessamyn rejects this activity. But her position of grown-up too busy to help Romy has less moral legitimacy when she is writing on her hand than it did when she was working on finishing her book. This hypocrisy is not lost on Romy, who quickly invokes a storyline that casts Jessamyn as miscreant and herself as one who judges. No explicit rule exists in the classroom about not writing on one's skin; however, it does seem likely that most adults, seeing a child

writing on herself, would at least question it and would most likely say to stop it. Romy's claim, then, that "you're not supposed to do that" is credible within U.S. middle-class culture without having to refer to a specific local norm. Jessamyn takes it seriously enough to stop writing on herself, after making the rather odd claim that her private ownership of the pen entitles her to use it on her skin. Jessamyn accepts Romy's position as judge, but rewrites the story as being about an unfair judge and an unjustly accused citizen acting within her rights of ownership. Enacting a storyline in which she is on good terms with legitimate authority, Jessamyn seeks out the teacher for one last conference about whether or not she is finished with her picture book. This move to the teacher brings into her relations with Romy a new storyline wherein Romy's claim to policing authority does not have to be given any attention.

What she finds out is that she still needs to write another page. In spite of the press to get done, she returns with the task stretched out before her just a little further. Rather than remarking on the continually demanding nature of the writing process, though, she maintains the position of being someone who is almost finished with her text. She brings back with her a storyline of brisk activity which has her working diligently and giving an account of her progress to Romy, which of course is not necessary. Jessamyn represents her own behavior as if she assumes that Romy is on her side, pulling for her to cross the finish line. Romy transforms this storyline into a challenge or competition, and consequently represents her own behavior again as getting an incredible amount of writing done, even post-picture book, leaving Jessamyn in the dust. Jessamyn apparently takes the competitive storyline seriously, as she replies with cruel clarity that pretty much all Romy is doing is writing the same sort of thing over and over on the pages of her writer's notebook. This rather adult-sounding barb appropriates a storyline of cutting-a-conceited-person-down-to-size. Jessamyn positions Romy as an emptily boasting buffoon, all show and no substance, positions the text as evidence of Romy's inferiority, and positions herself as a critic willing to speak the difficult truth.

Perhaps sensing that she has gone too far in criticizing Romy's writing, Jessamyn restores the friendship storyline. Romy holds briefly onto a storyline of wounded betrayal, a position of being the injured and aggrieved party, and uses her ignorance of Jessamyn's storyline ("I didn't know. . .") to cast Jessamyn as an abuser. Here, the conflict of storylines is made explicit through accountive positioning (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). But she wants a restoration of the friendship storyline, too, and so positions the text as a surprise gift for Jessamyn, with Jessamyn as the beloved. Jessamyn returns to her position as motherly and in-the-know, with Romy as having it all wrong about the text being a surprise. The prior visual proximity of the text, in other words, negates its position as a surprise gift. Romy holds her ground, saying that though Jessamyn may know the genre, she

does not know the actual content of this text, so it will be a surprise. The last piece of the conversation for this day's writing time sees Jessamyn feeding her name to Romy, bite by bite, and Romy encoding a representation of Jessamyn into her text, which is itself a gift for Jessamyn.

Though analytically separable, the elements of self-position, other-position, text-position, positioning genre, and discursive resource work interdependently, as a single system. The storyline has been our term for describing this whole system, though it is not determinative of positions. Rather, "storyline" describes the relations among the self, other, and text functions, and makes them cohere. What positioning shows is the continuing impulse to narrativize, to draw upon intertexts and intercontexts (Floriani, 1994) in order to make something of the present situation. All positions and relations among positions are drawn from discourses, since the semiotic resources of discourses, by definition, define subjectivities and potential relations. However, particular choices in importing positions, relations, and signs from across varied discourses is what gives individuals "voice." When in the context of a writing lesson in school, one talks like a mother, a lonely child, or a busy worker; choosing a voice that may even be transgressive in this context, one both draws on constrained, historically defined social resources and also acts with some degree of inventiveness.

Discussion

Much is happening in this scene, and positional shifts occur quickly—there are many sub-episodes of positioning moves within this short span of time, especially considering the fact that any one message unit may involve multiple positionings, made coherent by the storyline in which they are enacted. Even when storylines remain in place for a number of episodes, such as the drama of Romy being finished with her book while Jessamyn continues to labor at hers, there are shifting subjectivities within that storyline, as it overlaps with other simultaneous moral storylines, like being a good friend, participating in the classroom, getting better at writing, acting grown, or being respectful toward a deity. This dynamic shifting is in the nature of positioning, and moreover is a feature that distinguishes positions from roles (Davies & Harré, 1990). Both girls are in the role of student. It could be argued that in the life of the class at large, they are both in the role of struggling student, in that this role is always available to be filled, and certain students will tend to occupy it most of the time (McDermott, 1987; Varenne & McDermott, 1999). As a formal structure of schooling, "struggling student" is more static and ritualistic than the fluid transformation in positions such as "scolding mother-recalcitrant child." However, in the pedagogical structures afforded by this classroom, students work in interaction with other students but somewhat independent of the teacher's direction and most of the class's scrutiny, and that affordance creates the possibility of multiple positionings even for the students

usually constituted by the environment as “weak.” This may be viewed as a strength of this kind of teaching structure, though some educators will feel less than comfortable with so many of the girls’ assumptions of strong positions having to occur at the expense of the partner.

Both girls and texts occupy many different positions in this episode. As van Langenhove and Harré (1999) and Carbaugh (1999) suggest, positions to which people assign themselves and others can only be appropriated from resources already available in the culture. Romy’s assigning Jessamyn the position of “slower student than I am” is not something invented on the spot, with absolute liberty of choice, but rather, the conversation has a familiar air (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). Romy can appropriate that storyline because it is always available in U.S. schools (Stuckey, 1991; Varenne & McDermott, 1999), in spite of the many structures in this school that were supposed to mitigate against such vertical competitiveness—inclusion, multi-age, narrative report cards, a workshop classroom, a teacher who expected children to be in diverse places in their literate development, a classroom ethic and discourse of being a good friend. The text, furthermore, was, for each girl in turn, a display of competence or incompetence, speed or slowness, much more than it was an aesthetic, personal, political, or intellectual artifact in its own right. The risk of perhaps being not good enough, of being made visible and vulnerable by the act of writing, cannot be traced to something inside either of the children, or a choice by the two of them, or to conditions put in place by the teacher, classroom, or school. It is, rather, a reflection of a theme in U.S. culture, and so is always potentially present for writers in any U.S. classroom. In the time period when the data were collected, a period of high-profile reform of schooling through testing and more insistent demands that all students perform to high academic standards at the same age, this theme of achievement/failure was particularly intense. That students compete even when they do not have to—and are therefore perhaps hobbled in their participation in non-competitive environments—is a product of their participation in the wider culture.

The fact that the students spend so much time lining up on an invisible developmental ladder is not only a function of their co-opting of storylines from outside the classroom, however. In spite of the valuing of somewhat diverse lines of development in this classroom and school, the teacher did communicate to students a vision of growth and “good” writing. A teleology, or movement in a purposeful direction toward an end-in-view, was present. As themes in the classroom discourse, achievements such as completing work, writing in such a way that others can understand you, or producing a lot of text are brokered into the short-term present timescale by the writing partner. The conversation, therefore, even when it does not accurately copy the teacher’s discourse, still involves selection and appropriation of some of its purposes.

In these interactions, the present moment is always linked to other moments,

and to the language that constitutes those moments in larger interactions. Each utterance, and the conversation as a whole text, exists within a thick intertext (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993) of other interactions and other contexts. When Liz interferes from another table, there is an instant connection to the previous episode in our data in which Liz repeatedly positioned Romy as socially inept, seemingly in defense of Jessamyn, and this action of Liz's is more mildly appropriated by Jessamyn. The references to a shared world of "God hearing you" do not spring logically from the warrants of the present conversation, but rather refer to other texts and contexts, presumably outside of school. In addition, our assertion above that the success and achievement theme in the conversation reflects the larger culture is a reading that requires references to other texts, seemingly far distant from the present transcript.

We now turn to the question of whether conversations such as the ones we have examined can illuminate any aspect of writing development. What zones of proximal development are active in these young writers' peer conversations? A zone of proximal development is an instance, in a particular context, of some larger pattern in the culture. Any transaction can be a zone of proximal development, and it is formed by pressures, constraints, tools, and resources drawn from the history of individuals' interaction in the culture. Every zone of proximal development occurs within discourses and activity systems, and participants in these zones appropriate parts of the discourse and activity system. Writers, like all learners, appropriate the activity systems of which they are a part. Positioning and its attendant risks are affordances of the instructional environment, just as much as are spelling patterns or rhetorical strategies. If the activity system encompassing the action of writing in schools includes conversations that position writers, conversations that bear social and emotional risk, then certain kinds of potential futures are thus embodied for these young writers. What kinds of futures are suggested by the data above? To suggest the nature of such futures, it may benefit us to explore the ways some adult writers are positioned by their previous experiences with others, and the consequences those past positionings might have with respect to an individual's experience and process of writing.

Richards (1986) describes how, even for a writer as experienced as a tenured Ph.D., it is difficult for her to trust herself and, even more pointedly, her colleagues, to be sympathetic, understanding, and supportive enough to show them her writing. She asserts that this trust in others is not just a pleasant thing to have, but is critical "because it is colleagues' responses that make it possible for me to trust myself" (p. 113). The risk is that every text one writes can "be used as evidence about what kind of a sociologist (and person) you are" (p. 113) and that therefore, when one writes, one could, without knowing it, be revealing to others that one isn't the person one claims to be. In our terms, others may position a text one writes to mitigate against the subject positions one is trying to assume, and the

text can therefore be used to deprive one of access, privilege, and power. Richards continues:

It's other people's responses that enable me to understand who I am. These then are the twists of risk: I trust myself (and can therefore risk writing down my ideas—things that I have made up) primarily because others I trust have told me that I am OK. But no one can tell me that until I actually do something, until I actually write something down. So there I am, faced with a blank page, confronting the risk of discovering that I cannot do what I set out to do, and therefore am not the person I pretend to be. (p. 117)

Examining the positions assumed and assigned by the young writers in our data, we see them exposed to risks, issues of trust, and vulnerable subject positions similar to those that Richards describes. Despite the awesome difference in the skill and experience level of someone as competent at academic matters as a university professor and that of two six- and seven-year-old, working-class, struggling students, Richards' reported internal socio-emotional landscape mirrors that which is visible in the children's conversations.

Bazerman (2001) provides a perspective on the ways early social experiences may bear on later writing, in an article synthesizing psychological theories of the interpersonal construction of selves with neo-Vygotskian cultural-historical activity theory. Building upon the psychological theories of Sullivan (1953, 1964) and Gabriele (1996), Bazerman points out that each person is born into a social world of particular others, each of whom is also socialized and positioned, and the individual must, in that specific context, form ideas about how to relate to other people (p. 177). Each person's development as a user of language involves learning, within a particular group of others, "to use language in ways other than for direct communication—to lie, dissemble, misdirect attention, pacify, or otherwise make the self-protective best of what is perceived as a difficult interpersonal situation" (p. 176). Early experiences with intimacy shape individuals' habits of interacting, and they learn that social situations progress along different storylines because of people's moods, commitments, anxieties, and dysfunctions. Each individual finds that "people often are dissatisfied with or refuse to participate in situations that both they and others would agree are to their benefit" (p. 175), and that people, in their difficulties getting along with social partners, deliberately or inadvertently fail to grow through their potential zones of proximal development. One's zone of proximal development is situated within one's prior experience and developed capacity, skill at "cooperative distributed participation" (p. 184), and aspects of the shared task to which one can attend without "mind-numbing anxiety" (p. 184). Zones of proximal development, in other words, are *peopled* by real, particular human beings—sometimes nervous wrecks, sometimes overconfident boors—each with her or his own peculiar constellation of anxieties, anger triggers, and other feelings and relational habits. Individuals may elect

to stay out of a zone of development, regardless of its proximity, because attempting what it requires of us is socially and emotionally too risky.

Learning to write—and writing in general—always means being caught in a zone of proximal development, an extension of oneself, the learner, into some new space of thinking with others. Consequently, writing is “drenched with security issues, anxieties, and self-concept” (p. 185). Because we have learned that others, audiences, social partners can respond in a variety of unpredictable ways, we progress with unease. Bazerman writes:

As writers alone at our desks, we regularly face our demons and uncertainties to plow into an anxiety-obscured unknown, driven by the spontaneous impulses of a possibly centered but potentially digressive consciousness, attuned we hope to the creative, spontaneous glimmerings of what we need to say and not blinded to the things we know about the subject and about our audience and our relation to them. At best our writings are driven by deep motivations and need satisfactions, among them the desire to integrate with others in successful collaborations to meet needs of oneself and society, and shaped by as wide a vision as we can muster. However, much can go wrong. (p. 185)

Using Bazerman’s ideas as a lens for interpreting our data, we find that Romy and Jessamyn externalize some of the kinds of anxieties, hopes, resistances, and positions that are common to adult writers. Translating their positioning into adult writer anxieties, we find “demons and uncertainties” such as these: Am I productive enough? Have I written enough? Am I done yet? Am I doing this right? Am I being too mean? Whose team am I on? Who is against me? How smart can I act? Am I seeming too strong for my peer group? Is this a stupid question? Can I keep my work organized enough to get it when I need it? Do I have to rewrite too much? Will people collaborate with me?

Many adults experience similar anxieties (Daly, Vangelisti & Witte, 1988; Faigley, Daly & Witte, 1981). Like these children’s texts, furthermore, the texts of adult writers serve as meeting places: sometimes sites of affiliation and sometimes of contested difference, stages for competence and also difficulty and failure, spaces of collaboration and multi-voicedness or of private ownership, places sometimes to be visible and sometimes to hide. If we understand writing to include all of these human dimensions, then these conversations among little girls where nothing much seems to be going on are actually packed with evidence of rehearsal for a writing life.

Implications

On the basis of this research, and many similar studies, policymakers and members of the press who cover education should expand the ways they talk about the work of teachers and students in schools. If it is important to monitor the degree to

which students can accomplish tasks like writing, reading, and mathematics, it is also important to monitor the quality of life and interaction that occurs in classrooms. The moments a child spends in school are not like the moments a car spends at a filling station. They are the moments of the child's life, presenting social and emotional challenges mixed in with the intellectual ones. A single utterance, as we have seen, responds to multiple demands on the person in the same moment. Very often for children, as for adults, the social and emotional demands of a moment are more defining than the cognitive ones.

Discussions of standards and consequences of assessment should take "opportunity to learn" into account (Elmore & Fuhrman, 1995; McDonnell, 1995), and public understandings of "opportunity to learn" should consider the opportunity for assuming a variety of positions with respect to skills and material. The position of "student who must demonstrate compliance" is not sufficient to create a writer. An account of how powerful individuals are asked to be in relation to others should be included in accounts of "opportunity to learn," since the intellectual tasks of learning never occur separate from relational systems shot through with power differences. What I have opportunity to learn is a function of who I have the opportunity to be.

Policy is built upon models of development. What it is important to ask about schools and the people who live in them is determined by an image of growth. Despite much research that establishes the multiple contingencies influencing development and learning, a static and linear model of development still shouts down all others in public policy. This study shows the intricate dances that occur as children grow into literate individuals. Schools must be understood as places that host those dances, as places where people grow into educated persons, and not as assembly lines that produce "achievement" in isolation from these dynamics. Teachers should understand the kinds of dances with identities we describe here. No doubt, many already do, even if they would use other words to describe what they see when their children interact. The concept of positioning is a useful tool in observing children's social behavior, and it may help teachers to appreciate even the interactions that look like bickering, turning what might have been merely annoying into an interesting and important negotiation of learning. Social development is not merely about "being nice"; it involves a much richer repertoire of ways to be. Learning to navigate one's way through such a repertoire and to come out in the end still feeling strong enough to compose is part of learning to be a writer. Students may benefit from opportunities to reflect, in the midst of writing, upon the times they feel like different sorts of people, the times they feel strong or weak or anxious, the times they see other writers around them acting different ways, and how they respond. In individual writing conferences, it may be worth monitoring the options the teacher has in positioning the student—and the observable consequences of that positioning. In planning whole-class lessons about

writing, it may be worthwhile to remember that learning to write is about learning to be in a particular kind of interaction—with other writers and with readers—and not just about a display of skill.

Too many conversations—both in and out of schools—diminish reading and writing to mechanistic processes rather than remaining mindful of the complicated humanness of lived experience. It is not merely compassion or a soft emphasis on feelings that makes us say this. Rather, we claim that our research, and the research tradition of which it is a part, provide evidence of the winding intricacies of literacy development in a person's life. An important dimension of an individual's development is the storyline she represents to herself, of the person she is becoming, the persons with whom she interacts, and the relations that are possible among them.

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Search for New Editor of *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*

NCTE is seeking a new editor of *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*. In May 2006, the term of the present editor, Howard Tinberg, will end. Interested persons should send a letter of application to be received **no later than November 1, 2004**. Letters should include the applicant's vision for the journal, and be accompanied by the applicant's vita, one sample of published writing, and two letters of general support from appropriate administrators at the applicant's institution. Do not send books, monographs, or other materials that cannot be easily copied for the Search Committee. The applicant appointed by the NCTE Executive Committee in April 2005 will effect a transition, preparing for his or her first issue in September 2006. The appointment is for five years. Applications should be addressed to Margaret Chambers, *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* Search Committee, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096. Questions regarding any aspect of the editorship should be directed to Margaret Chambers, Division Director, Publications: mchambers@ncte.org; (800) 369-6283, extension 3623.

APPENDIX A: MICROANALYSIS OF FIELDNOTE EPISODE

Agent	Utterance	Body language	Self positioning	Other positioning	Text function	Storyline	Cultural resource	Positioning genre
Romy		<i>R has finished her picture book and is writing in her notebook, beginning with the date.</i>	Diligent writer	NA	Genre as locator in classroom procedure			Performance
Romy	<i>I messed up my 2. I messed up again.</i>		Inept	Monitor of correctness	Evidence of incompetence	Judging teacher, Flustered student	School	Representation of behavior
Romy	<i>You got two more to color?</i>	<i>She refers to the pages in J's picture book.</i>	Monitor of speed and progress, lonely child	Playmate, slower, less capable	Evidence of incompetence: slowness	Boss and worker, waiting playmate	Pop culture/sibling	Representation of behavior
Jessamyn	<i>Yeah.</i>		Busy adult	Pestering child	What removes me from you	Worker and pest	Home with parent	Interaction
Romy	<i>There! That's better.</i>	<i>R finishes her date.</i>	Competent	Witness to competence	Site of achievement	Good girl with mommy		Representation of behavior
Romy		<i>She draws a girl with a frown.</i>						
Romy	<i>Read my story when I'm done.</i>		Working to please, productive writer	One to please, witness to competence	Predicted achievement, connection in future	Making surprise, setting up audience	Home with parent	Assignment: role

APPENDIX A: CONTINUED

Agent	Utterance	Body language	Self positioning	Other positioning	Text function	Storyline	Cultural resource	Positioning genre
Jessamyn		<i>I keeps working on her pages.</i>	Diligent writer	Potential distracter	Work to be done	Worker and pest	Home with parent	Interaction
Romy	<i>How do you spell bird?</i>		Academically needy	More competent	Problem to solve, evidence: need	More and less knowledgeable	Home with parent, School	Subjugation/ dominance
Jessamyn		[no reply]	Diligent writer	Potential distracter	Work to be done	Worker and pest	Home with parent	Interaction
Romy	<i>Is this a round D?</i>	<i>R points to the entry in her own notebook.</i>	Need of knowledge	More competent	Problem to solve, Evidence: need	More and less knowledgeable	Home with parent, School	Subjugation/ dominance
Jessamyn		[no reply]	Diligent worker	Potential distracter	Work to be done	Worker and pest	Home with parent	Interaction
Romy	<i>Are you done?</i>		Monitor of speed/progress	Slower, less capable	Evidence of incompetence: slowness; sign of progress	Judging teacher, flustered student, boss, and worker	School, Parent experience	Representation of behavior
Jessamyn	<i>I'm almost SUPER-done.</i>		Competent	Monitor of progress	Sign of progress	Boss and worker	Parent experience, school	Representation of behavior

APPENDIX B: CATALOGUE OF POSITIONS, STORYLINES, RESOURCES, GENRES, FUNCTIONS, AND ACTIONS

Self-positions

Inept person
Monitor: speed, progress
Lonely child
Incorrigible child
Slower student
Busy student
Praiseworthy student
Working to please
Academically needy
Competent student
Mother
Referee
Falsely accused party
Injured party
Exasperated partner
Reasonable person
Defiant minority
Judging teacher
Speedier student
Confused respondent
Needing protection
Curious friend
Good friend
Collaborator

Other positions

Monitor: for correctness, progress, meaning
Less capable:
 slower, meaningless, negligent &
 inadequate
Playmate
One to please
Pest
More capable student
Child
Transgressor
Unfair judge
Defense witness
Abuser
Persistent pain
Parallel worker

Crazy person

Oppressor
Good friend
Collaborator

Text functions

Evidence:

 Incompetence
 Mistake
 Slowness
 Lack knowledge
 Bad behavior
 Disorganized
 Inability to write

 Competence

Work focus

Connection in future

Null

Meaning

Custom-made puzzle activity

Gift

Location of need

Storylines

Judging teacher and flustered student

Boss and worker

Worker and pest

Mommy and good girl

Making a surprise

Setting up audience

More and less knowledgeable

Mommy and unruly child

Stepping in to protect

Accuser and accused

Partners on the verge of giving up

Parallel workers

Debate opponents

Resisting unjust and illegitimate authority

Waiting for playmate

Mommy and curious child

Confused by communicative incompetence

Reasonable person with emotional one

Better performer showing up lesser
Mutually curious, interested friends
Successful completion with cheerleader
Snide undercutting of conceited
Good friends who can enjoy a joke
Collaborative writers

Discursive resources

Popular culture
Parent experience
School
Home experience as child with parent

Siblings or playground

Genres

Representation of behavior
Actual interaction (acting as if)
Attitudes
Assignment of roles
Domination or subjugation
Attributions of agency
Acquiescence in positioning
Resistance to positioning

Award for Innovation Winners Announced

The Conference on Basic Writing (CBW) is pleased to announce the winners of its first annual Award for Innovation:

San Francisco State University, "Literacy Unleashed—An Integrated Approach to Reading and Writing." Application submitted by Professor Helen P. Gillotte-Tropp.

The University of Wyoming, "The Synergy Project: A Learning Community for 'At-Risk' and Basic Writing Students." Application submitted by Professor Kelly Belanger.

The application materials were judged on originality (the creativity and uniqueness of the innovation), portability (the extent to which the innovation lends itself to application in other institutions or contexts), and results and benefits (specific details, data, and observations derived from the innovation, focusing on specific educational benefits to students). The winning schools will be presented with a plaque at the Special Interest Group (SIG) meeting at the upcoming Conference on College Composition and Communication, in San Antonio. Winners also will be invited to give a brief presentation about their award-winning innovative program to SIG members.

For more information on the Conference on Basic Writing, see: <http://www.asu.edu/clas/english/composition/cbw/>